

Fecha de recepción: 20 mayo 2018  
Fecha de aceptación: 15 septiembre 2018  
Fecha de publicación: 31 diciembre 2018  
URL: <http://oceanide.netne.net/articulos/art11-3.pdf>  
Oceánide número 11, ISSN 1989-6328

## “This Country Might Be Rather Swamped by People with a Different Culture”: Immigration in Britain and the Prefiguration of the Discourse of Thatcherism in the Late 1970s

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### RESUMEN:

Tras su elección como líder del Partido Conservador en 1975, Margaret Thatcher se convirtió en la primera mujer Primera Ministra del Reino Unido entre 1979 y 1990. La influencia fundamental de sus gobiernos tanto en la política como en la vida británica en su conjunto llevó a acuñar el término “thatcherismo” para ilustrar no sólo las políticas sociales y económicas de Thatcher, sino también su estilo de liderazgo. Este artículo se acerca críticamente a una entrevista a Margaret Thatcher para Granada TV retransmitida el 30 de enero de 1978. Thatcher habría de convertirse en Primera Ministra en mayo de 1979, pero, cuando se le hizo la entrevista el 30 de enero de 1978, ya era líder del Partido Conservador. Al exponer su visión sobre temas como desempleo, política económica, sueldos, vivienda, industrias privatizadas y estatales, ley y orden o sindicatos, se puede afirmar que la entrevista prefigura ya el discurso del thatcherismo que comenzaría a cobrar cuerpo cuando Margaret Thatcher se convirtiera en Primera Ministra más de un año más tarde. Sin embargo, la entrevista es especialmente reveladora de la visión de Thatcher sobre cuestiones de raza y nacionalidad en general y sobre inmigración en concreto. Así pues, sin dejar de lado otras dimensiones que tendrían una función constitutiva en la articulación del thatcherismo, el foco de análisis de este artefacto cultural es precisamente el papel de los aspectos de raza, nacionalidad y especialmente la inmigración en la anticipación del thatcherismo de años venideros. Con ese fin, la entrevista se examina desde una perspectiva de Análisis Crítico del Discurso, que profundiza en “discursos institucionales, políticos, de género y mediáticos (en un sentido amplio) que atestiguan relaciones de poder y conflictos más o menos abiertos” (Wodak, 2001: 2). Este enfoque se elige al ser consecuente con el propósito de la aportación de desentrañar la función fundamental desempeñada por el lenguaje para descifrar el papel de la inmigración en la articulación del thatcherismo como discurso. Por consiguiente, el artículo viene a arrojar luz sobre cómo se presagia el thatcherismo en muestras textuales específicas con anterioridad al comienzo de los gobiernos de Margaret Thatcher.

**Palabras clave:** Reino Unido, Análisis Crítico del Discurso, inmigración, años 70 tardíos, thatcherismo

### ABSTRACT:

Following her election as leader of the Conservative Party in 1975, Margaret Thatcher became the UK's first woman Prime Minister between 1979 and 1990. The fundamental influence of her governments on both British politics and British life as a whole resulted in the term 'Thatcherism' being coined to illustrate not only Thatcher's political, social and economic policies, but also her style of leadership. This paper critically explores an interview with Margaret Thatcher for Granada TV broadcast on 30 January, 1978. Thatcher was to become Prime Minister in May, 1979, yet when the interview was made on 30 January, 1978, she was already leader of the Conservative Party. In expounding her views on such issues as unemployment, monetary policy, pay, housing, privatized and state industries, law and order or trade unions, the interview may be claimed to prefigure the discourse of Thatcherism which would start to take shape when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister more than one year later. However, the interview is particularly illustrative of Thatcher's views on race and nationality in general and immigration in particular. Thus, without disregarding other dimensions that would have such a constitutional function in the articulation of Thatcherism, the focus of the analysis of this cultural artefact is precisely on the role of race, nationality and immigration in the anticipation of Thatcherism in years to come. To that end, the interview is examined from a critical discourse analysis perspective delving into “institutional, political, gender and media discourses (in the broad sense) which testify to more or less overt relations of struggle and conflict” (Wodak, 2001: 2). This approach is chosen as consistent with the contribution's attempt to disentangle the fundamental function played by language usage for deciphering the role of immigration in the articulation of the discourse of Thatcherism. The paper accordingly comes to shed light on how Thatcherism is foreshadowed in specific textual samples prior to the commencement of Margaret Thatcher's governments.

**Keywords:** Britain, critical discourse analysis, immigration, late 1970s, Thatcherism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Following her election as leader of the Conservative Party in 1975, Margaret Thatcher became the UK's Prime Minister between 1979 and 1990 after winning the 1979, 1983 and 1987 general elections. The fundamental influence of her governments not only on British politics but also on British life as a whole resulted in the term 'Thatcherism' being coined. Today, it is widely acknowledged that during her time as British Prime Minister "the Conservative Party reduced taxes, took away power from the Trade Unions, and started a programme of privatization" (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*, 2005: 1438) as key policies to her new approach to Conservatism in the UK. This paper critically reads an interview with Margaret Thatcher for Granada Television broadcast at 08:30 p.m. on 30 January, 1978. The interview, conducted by journalist Gordon Burns, was part of the World in Action series of current affairs investigative programmes produced by Granada TV between 1963 and 1998<sup>1</sup>.

Margaret Thatcher was to become Prime Minister on May 1979, yet when the interview was made on 30 January, 1978, she was already leader of the Conservative Party. As stated by World in Action programme commentator before the beginning of Gordon Burn's actual interview,

With an election in prospect and the polls pointing to a recovery in support for Labour, WORLD IN ACTION asks Margaret Thatcher, leader of the Conservative Party about immigration, unemployment, pay policy and Conservative electoral prospects—and on future relations with Edward Heath and Enoch Powell.

In expounding her views on such issues as unemployment, monetary policy, pay, housing, privatized and state industries, law and order or trade unions, the interview may be claimed to prefigure the discourse of Thatcherism which would start to take shape when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister more than one year later. In point of fact, the interview is particularly illustrative of Thatcher's views on race and nationality in general and immigration in particular. Thus, without disregarding other dimensions that would have such a constitutional function in the articulation of Thatcherism, the focus of our analysis of this cultural artefact is

precisely on the role of race, nationality and immigration in the anticipation of Thatcherism in years to come. To that end, the interview is examined from a critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) perspective delving into "institutional, political, gender and media discourses (in the broad sense which testify to more or less overt relations of struggle and conflict" (Wodak, 2001: 2). This approach has been chosen as consistent with our attempt to disentangle the fundamental function played by language usage for deciphering the role of immigration in the articulation of the discourse of Thatcherism. Above all, given that it is the overall purpose of this contribution to shed light on how Thatcherism is foreshadowed in specific textual samples prior to the commencement of Margaret Thatcher's governments, CDA seems to be an appropriate analytical method, as it "views the systematic analysis and interpretation of texts as potentially revelatory of ways in which discourses consolidate power and colonize human subjects through often covert position calls" (Locke, 2004: 2). Admittedly, CDS investigates "the connections between the use of language and the social and political contexts" (Paltridge, 2006: 179), so that it is particularly concerned, among others, with such issues as "ethnicity, cultural difference, ideology and identity and how these are both constructed and reflected in texts" (*ibid.*), all of which are crucial for making sense of race, nation(alism) and immigration in the political discourse of Thatcherism as foreshadowed in the interview herein explored.

## 2. TOWARDS A PREFIGURATION OF THATCHERISM

In his examination of Thatcherism, Fernández Sánchez (1999: 37-39) acknowledges the existence of renowned theorists (e.g. Holmes, 1985, 1989; Morgan, 1992) who have classified the history and evolution of Thatcherism based on the successive governments of Margaret Thatcher between 1979 and 1990. However, Fernández Sánchez (1999: 38) advocates using Jessop et al.'s (1988) approach to Thatcherism on grounds of their consideration of the period prior to Thatcher's first government precisely as an inception of Thatcherism, thereby endorsing Jessop et al.'s (1988) perspective as they "focus more on the evolution of the political project of the Prime Minister than on the general conditions of the country" (Fernández Sánchez, 1999: 38, our translation). So, in addition to a broadly standardized division

of the period into three stages comprising its process of consolidation (1979-1982), Thatcherism—fully—consolidated (1982-1989) and its decline and ending (1989-1990), Fernández Sánchez (1999: 38-39) follows Jessop et al.'s (1988) distribution of the period in considering an initial stage corresponding to the rise of Thatcherism (1975-79); this period would start with the appointment of Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party and conclude when she came to power after the 1979 general election. This phase may thus be conceived of as a 'prefiguration' of Thatcherism per se inasmuch as, over these four years, "Margaret Thatcher's project and her victory in 1979 were the culmination of a reflection process within the [Conservative] Party on the sources of true Conservatism" (Fernández Sánchez, 1999: 56, our translation). In actual fact, contrary to her predecessor as leader of the Conservative Party, Margaret Thatcher soon abandoned Edward Heath's more centrist policies, and, as well as embracing "monetarism in her economic policy" (Gardiner, 2000: 658), she "also advocated a tough line on law and order, defence *and immigration*" (Gardiner, *ibid.*, emphasis added) in her new approach to Conservatism in the UK. As highlighted by Cannon, "as leader of the opposition between 1975 and 1979, under the influence of Sir Keith Joseph, she moved towards that ideal of political patriotism, low taxes, private ownership, balanced budgets, and individual initiative which later became known as Thatcherism" (2009: 628). Nonetheless, to some historians like Rebecca Fraser the antecedents of Thatcherism could even be traced back to the days when Margaret Thatcher had been education minister under Edward Heath between 1970 and 1974, giving "some hint of the shape of things to come when she ended free milk in schools, gaining the nickname 'Mrs Thatcher, milk snatcher'" (2003: 759).

### 3. FROM DECOLONIZATION TO IMMIGRATION IN BRITAIN IN THE LATE 1970S

After the end of World War II the dissolution of the British Empire was accelerated. Although countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Egypt and Iraq had gained independence before 1945, the retreat from the Empire happened chiefly between 1945 and 1973. As part of a first phase under Labour governments, in the 1940s Asian territories like India (1947), Pakistan (1947), Burma (1948) or Palestine (1948) became independent. In the course of a second phase presided

over by the Conservatives, the retreat from former African colonial possessions took place between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, which led to the independence of territories like Sudan (1956), Ghana (1957), Sierra Leone (1961), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1962), Kenya (1963), Zanzibar (1963), Zambia (1964) or Botswana (1965), among others. In addition to the independence of Aden in 1967, the decolonization process continued between the late sixties and early seventies with, to quote a few examples, the Gulf States (i.e. Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates), which achieved new national status in 1971, and former colonies in the Far East (e.g. Bangladesh, 1972) and the Pacific (e.g. Tonga, 1970; Fiji, 1970), so that "in the 1970s and 1980s smaller Caribbean Islands and Zimbabwe left the Empire" (Cunliffe et al., 2004: 260).

Contrary to other decolonization processes, it is often contended that, "the dismantling of the British Empire took place comparatively peacefully, so that good relations between Britain and the newly independent countries were established" (O'Driscoll, 2003: 114). As a matter of fact, most of the new independent countries—once part of the British Empire—became part of the Commonwealth, which, having been formally established in 1931 with the Statute of Westminster, started to work in an attempt "to promote co-operation between governments, encourage the spread of democracy and aid economic development" (Fraenkel et al. 2004: 231). As happened in Western Europe on the whole, after World War II there was "a huge demand for unskilled labour in Britain" (Kearney, 1995: 281), leading to the arrival of the first post-war immigrants from Jamaica on the *Empire Windrush* in 1948. The retreat from the British Empire was soon followed by a process of immigration from the former colonies, as a result of which "immigration from the black Commonwealth from 1950 onwards [...] introduced new minority cultures" (Morgan, 2010: 686). However, as Cunliffe et al. put it, "paradoxically, just as Britain was retreating from its formal imperial commitments, Commonwealth immigration into Britain, principally from the West Indies and South Asia, was becoming an increasingly salient issue in British domestic politics" (2004: 261). In his assessment of twentieth-century immigration in the UK, Kramer illuminatingly argues that "the history of immigration has been punctuated by discussions of how to let 'desirable' people (of 'good human stock') in and keep

others out" (2007: 182). By 1978, when the interview was conducted, different Acts of Parliament had been passed—in 1962, 1968 and 1971—endeavouring to regulate, and progressively restrict, immigration in the country. For hostility towards black people and racist attacks had grown in the 1960s: "Politicians in both main parties believed that the number of black immigrants from Commonwealth countries should be limited, arguing that, if their numbers were not great, white Britons would be more likely to accept them" (Corbishley et al., 2006: 388). As Thatcher herself insists when asked by Gordon Burns on the subject, "Well now, we did make a very considerable cutback, as you remember, in 1971". All in all, such limitations on immigration in the UK were to continue since their inception in the 1960s, and were portrayed "by their critics as particularly harsh towards immigrants from the 'new' Commonwealth" (Gardiner, 2000: 457).

In this context, Enoch Powell—an Ulster Unionist close to the Conservative Party at the time—had strongly criticized immigration from the Commonwealth and anti-discrimination legislation with his 'Rivers of Blood' speech, an "inflammatory address" (Sked and Cook, 1993: 232) delivered in 1968. Despite the Race Relations Acts passed in 1965, 1968 and 1976 making "racial discrimination illegal in housing, employment and insurance or financial services" (Gardiner, 2000: 566), with the sharp rise in unemployment in the seventies, "the relationship between black immigrants and the white population of Britain was not easy" (McDowall, 2004: 177), the new immigrants being more often than not wrongly blamed for the situation. By the end of the decade, the 'coloured' minorities who had migrated to Britain from India, Pakistan, West Africa and the West Indies amounted to over a million people, often facing "racial discrimination in employment and (sometimes) at the hands of the police" as well as "the added hazard of racial bigotry in older urban areas" (Morgan, 2000: 76-77).

#### **4. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL NOTES ON THE ANALYSIS OF THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL ISSUES**

In a well-known definition of the field, Teun van Dijk takes CDA to be "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (2003:

352). Laying a strong emphasis on such a connection between the use of language and the social and political context, CDA "also investigates ways in which language constructs and is constructed by social relationships" (Paltridge, 2006: 179), which a basic premise taken into consideration in the present piece attempting to shed light on how language usage in the discursive sample scrutinised not only is determined by but also shapes the construction of immigration-based ethnic relations in the political project elaborated on by Margaret Thatcher in this interview. As Sara Mills notes, CDA has been particularly "concerned with power relations and the way these shape the production of utterances and texts, but their methodology has been influenced by linguistics and cultural theory" (2005: 8). In so doing, the abstract approach to 'discourse' pertaining in the post-structuralist tradition conceiving of this notion as "the practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972: 149) has been fused with the long linguistic tradition dealing with 'discourse' "either as a complex of linguistic forms larger than the single sentence (a 'text') or as 'language-in-use', i.e. linguistic structures actually used by people" (Blommaert, 2005: 2). CDA has accordingly bridged the gap between both approaches to discourse by embedding the use of actual language—alone or in combination with others semiotic modes—within broader socio-cultural practices via specific interactions: "Discourse, and any specific instance of discursive practice, is seen as simultaneously (i) a language text, spoken or written, (ii) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), (iii) sociocultural practice" (Fairclough, 1995: 97).

Contrary to other traditions of CDA (for detailed overviews, see van Dijk, 2003; Richardson et al., 2013; Wodak, 2013), Norman Fairclough (e.g. Fairclough 1995, 2001, 2003, 2014) draws upon this approach to discourse in an ever-changing framework for the analysis of "socio-cultural change and change in discourse" (Fairclough, and Wodak, 1997: 264), an analytical perspective that has been deemed to be particularly adequate for the type of analysis carried out in this paper. From a methodological perspective, the interview herein examined is thus regarded as an instance of discourse, whose textual dimension—the interview transcript—is taken to be part of a discursive practice or interaction—Margaret Thatcher's interview by Gordon Burns on television. This form of interaction is subsequently discussed

as being embedded in a broader social practice concerning politics and social life in Britain at the time.

As Fairclough adds in a further consideration of the term, “‘discourse’ is also used more specifically: different discourses are different ways of representing aspects of the world” (2003: 215). In this sense, Thatcherism may be understood as one such type of discourse, representing and constructing British politics between 1975 and 1990. A basic tenet of CDA in this regard is that

major social and political processes and movements such as Thatcherism [...] have a partly linguistic-discursive character. That follows from the fact that social and political changes in contemporary society generally include a substantive element of cultural and ideological change. (Fairclough, and Wodak, 1997: 271)

According to Bloor and Bloor, “central to CDA is the understanding that discourse is an integral aspect of power and control” (2007: 4), which makes it a method particularly suitable for the analysis of Thatcherism—and its earliest manifestations before Margaret Thatcher took office—as “the general principles on which Margaret Thatcher’s governments were based when she was Prime Minister of the UK” (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*, 2005: 1438). More specifically, Thatcherism

has been described as being an attempt to construct a new hegemony, a new basis for winning popular consent, as well as being a set of free market economic strategies, and a political project for strengthening and centralizing the state, pushing back the structures and institutions of social democracy, weakening the trade unions and so forth. (Hall, and Jacques; qtd. in Fairclough, and Wodak, 1997: 271)

By and large, CDA “views reality as textually and intertextually mediated via verbal and non-verbal language systems, and texts as sites for both the inculcation and constitution of discourses” (Locke, 2004: 2). With a special focus on immigration, CDA has, therefore, been chosen as an analytical resource for investigating how the discourse of Thatcherism is presaged in specific texts—or rather discursive samples—like the TV interview under study in this article.

## 5. BRINGING IMMIGRATION TO THE FORE IN EARLY THATCHERISM: AN TV INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET THATCHER IN 1978

Strictly speaking, the general principles of Thatcherism began to take shape when Margaret Thatcher first became Prime Minister on 4 May, 1979, and were fully deployed during her three terms of office—until her resignation on 28 November, 1990. However, by the time Mrs Thatcher won the 1979 general elections she had been leader of the Conservative Party since 1975. As stressed by the *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*, “under her leadership, politics in the UK became much more right-wing” (2005: 1438), something which differentiated her from traditional Conservatism. Thatcherism—and its veer to the right—may thus be maintained to have started to be prefigured years before Thatcher’s premiership.

In the course of the World in Action interview for Granada TV, Margaret Thatcher is asked not only about immigration, but also about a number of other major social and political issues in Britain in 1978. Nevertheless, given the scope and purpose of this contribution, we will focus on the first part of the interview—without disregarding the rest of the document, where other constitutional dimensions of Thatcherism are undeniably expounded on by the interviewee—precisely because in her replies to Burns’s questions about immigration, Mrs Thatcher comes to express her viewpoint on race and nationality in the UK in general and immigration in particular.

### 5.1. Constructing Fear of Immigration and Populism: The Textual Dimension of Early Thatcherism

Journalist Gordon Burns explicitly starts his interview alluding to the “considerable controversy and confusion in recent weeks about possible new get-tough Tory policy over immigration”. In directly asking Mrs Thatcher about the severity of prospective cutbacks if she wins the forthcoming general election, he makes reference to the “[...] threats that you may well make major cutbacks on the level of immigrants allowed into this country [...]”. In her reply, Mrs Thatcher predicts that, if the level of immigration is not reduced, by the end of the century there might be four million people of the New Commonwealth, insisting not only that “[...] people are really rather afraid that

this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture [...]", but also that "[...] the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in". Perhaps more importantly, Thatcher concludes her answer to the first question arguing that "[...] if you want good race relations, you have got to allay peoples' fears on numbers", likewise adding that, "[...] we do have to hold out the prospect of an end to immigration [...]". When the journalist enquires which the acceptable figure of immigrants per year might be, Thatcher replies putting forward an argument based on her own fears that good race relations in Britain could be endangered on the one hand ("[...] my great fear is now that if we get them coming in at that rate people will turn round and we shall not have good race relations with those who are here"), and on immigrants already living in the country being afraid of British people prospectively becoming hostile to them on the other ("[...] I think, is why quite a lot of them too are fearful that their position might be put in jeopardy or people might be hostile to them unless we cut down the incoming numbers"). When asked by Burns how the already strict immigration rules of entry could be strengthened, Thatcher mentions previous political attempts to repeal the 1971 and 1968 Immigration Acts allowing immigrants to settle permanently and bring their families, emphasizing that "[...] we must hold out the prospect of a clear end to immigration [...]". "[...] I am certain that is the right view to keep good race relations and to keep fundamental British characteristics which have done so much for the world", she reiterates. After the interviewer's last question concerning whether the debate on immigration will be a major issue for the Conservatives in the next general election, Mrs Thatcher reacts by adopting a certainly patriotic attitude in defence of the British character ("We are a British nation with British characteristics. Every country can take some small minorities and in many ways they add to the richness and variety of this country"). What is more, the tenor of her remarks may be characterised as definitely populist as she hints at the potential dangers of minorities of immigrants for the UK ("The moment the minority threatens to become a big one, people get frightened").

When dealing with the issue of immigration and the need to significantly reduce the

number of incoming immigrants, Thatcher draws upon lexical fields<sup>2</sup> revolving around fear, thus projecting her own horror as a Conservative politician ("[...] *my great fear* is now that if we get them coming in at that rate people will turn round and we shall not have good race relations with those who are here") onto (white) British citizens as a whole ("[...] people *are really rather afraid* that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture [...]"; "[...] if there is *any fear* that it [the UK] might be swamped [...]"; "The moment the minority *threatens* to become a big one, people *get frightened*"). In particular, she alludes to those immigrants already living in the UK being suspicious of new immigrants ("[...] I think, is why quite a lot of them too *are fearful* that their position might be *put in jeopardy* or people might *be hostile to them* unless we cut down the incoming numbers").

Margaret Thatcher's sense of alarm is epitomized by her articulation of a strong 'othering' of immigrants, that is, *them* (e.g. "Every country can take some small minorities and in many ways *they* add to the richness and variety of this country") in contrast to the British nation, namely *us* (e.g. "We are a British nation with British characteristics"). Thatcher's emphasis on preserving 'good race relations' by bringing immigration to an end goes hand in hand with her defence of the values of traditional—and strongly nationalistic—Conservatism (e.g. "[...] the *British character* has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world [...]"; "[...] to keep fundamental *British characteristics* which have done so much for the world"; "We are a *British nation* with *British characteristics*"). In a sense, the character of her words becomes not only populist but also somewhat menacing as she warns of the potential dangers of the minority of immigrants for the UK (e.g. "The moment the minority threatens to become a big one, people *get frightened*")<sup>3</sup>.

Thatcher reinforces the discourse of apprehension vis-à-vis immigration by using strong modalities whereby she predicts interracial conflict if immigration continues to grow (e.g. "[...] if there is any fear that it might be swamped people *are going to react* and be rather hostile to those coming in"; "[...] my great fear is now that if we get them coming in at that rate *people will turn round* and we shall *not have good race relations* with those who are here"; "[...] if you want good race relations, you *have got to allay* peoples' fears on numbers").

Her use of 'generic *you*'—referring to "people in general" (Goatly, 2000: 97)—serves Thatcher to validate her reasons for restricting immigration as universal truths, somehow pretending that she will not be responsible for such controversial decisions (e.g. "[...] if *you* want good race relations, *you* have got to allay peoples' fears on numbers"; "So, either you go on taking in 40 or 50,000 a year, which is far too many [...]"). Perhaps more significantly, her use of 'inclusive *we*'<sup>4</sup> contributes to transferring her own position about immigration to the Conservative party on the whole and, without a doubt, to the whole British nation (e.g. "You see, my great fear is now that if *we* get them coming in at that rate people will turn round and *we* shall not have good race relations with those who are here"; "[...] *we* cannot go on taking that number"; "[...] *we* did make a very considerable cutback, as you remember, in 1971"; etc). In this connection, Margaret Thatcher's constant allusions to 'people' in her arguments in favour of radically reducing immigration contributes to the aura of populism of her discourse on immigration (e.g. "[...] *people* are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture [...]"; "[...] if there is any fear that it [this country] might be swamped *people* are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in"; "So, if you want good race relations, you have got to allay *people's* fears on numbers"; "You see, my great fear is now that if we get them coming in at that rate *people* will turn round [...]"; "[...] that, I think, is why quite a lot of them too are fearful that their position might be put in jeopardy or *people* might be hostile to them unless we cut down the incoming numbers" "The moment the minority threatens to become a big one, *people* get frightened")<sup>5</sup>.

## 5.2. Including Immigration in a Novel Combination of Discourses: Foreshadowing Thatcherism in Interaction

The textual features examined above come to shape an interaction between Margaret Thatcher, leader of the Conservative Party at the time, and journalist Gordon Burns for the World in Action current affairs series broadcast by Granada TV. In complying with the generic conventions of political interviews on television, the type of discourse thus produced acquires the massive distribution of media discourse. In her replies to Burn's questions on immigration, Thatcher comes to portend the type of discourse characterising Thatcherism in the 1980s: "Thatcherism

as an ideological project for building a new hegemony can be seen as an attempt to restructure political discourse by combining diverse existing discourses together in a new way" (Fairclough, and Wodak, 1997: 271) They hold that Thatcherism takes shape as a characteristic combination of discourses, including "traditional conservative discourse", "elements of a liberal political discourse and economic discourse" and "elements from discourses of ordinary life and ordinary experience which give Thatcher's discourse the populist quality referred to" (Fairclough, and Wodak, *ibid.*) Wright points out in this respect that "critical observers coined phrases like 'authoritarian *populism*' and the 'free market and strong state'" (2003: 42; our emphasis) to describe this new form of Conservatism embodied by Thatcher, "at once liberal in economics and uncompromisingly Tory in politics" (Wright, *ibid.*). As the textual dimension of the discursive sample examined has illustrated, in addition to Thatcher's utilization of a remarkably populist discourse, her discourse on immigration incorporates features of a traditional conservative discourse, especially when she contrasts the 1975 Labour Party Conference's comparatively relaxed stance on immigration (e.g. "[...] they voted to repeal the 1971 Act and part of the 1968 Act") with the far more restrictive position of the Conservative Party at the time ("We thought it was necessary to *strengthen the position*"). Her comments similarly integrate elements not only of an economic discourse (e.g. "They could come here for a job but they had not the right to settle permanently and they had not necessarily the right to bring their families for permanent settlement"), but also of a liberal political discourse, e.g.:

It is not as if we have great wide open spaces or great natural resources; we have not. So, either you go on taking in 40 or 50,000 [immigrants] a year, which is far too many, or you say we must hold out the prospect of a clear end to immigration and that is the view we have taken [...].

Although the liberal and economic dimensions of Thatcherism are not the main focus of this piece, it comes as no surprise that, even when exploring the interview from the point of view of immigration alone, such elements are vital to make sense of Thatcher's view of Conservatism, since she is being interviewed with the 1979 election in prospect, and "Mrs Thatcher's election

manifesto was committed to economic liberalism" (Sieper, 1993: 111).

In their observations about Thatcherism, Fairclough and Wodak underscore that "this novel combination of discourses is associated with distinctive representations of reality and distinctive constructions of social and political relations and identities" (1997: 272). The issue of immigration was a crucial area of tensions in the social and political relations in the UK in the early seventies and indeed in subsequent years. Therefore, Thatcher's articulation of a strong national, or rather nationalistic, discourse—through policies of strengthening and centralizing the state in the course of her conservative governments—results in her decidedly populist defence of traditional British values, a strong emphasis being laid on what she conceives of as "fundamental British characteristics which have done so much for the world" as opposed to the values of "people with a different culture". In this sense, it is noteworthy that, from a pragmatic point of view, Thatcher's utterances about 'good race relations' contain presuppositions<sup>6</sup> that, if the threat of immigration is not drastically dealt with, the situation may prove catastrophic for the country before long. Certain statements (e.g. "[...] I am certain that is the right view to keep good race relations [...]"; "[...] if you want good race relations, you have got to allay peoples' fears on numbers"; "[...] if we get them coming in at that rate people will turn round and we shall not have good race relations with those who are here") presuppose that such race relations may stop being 'good', something that she takes for granted yet may not necessarily be the case. Using pragmatic strategies aiding her in articulating her populist discourse on immigration, Thatcher's insistence on British citizens' unpredicable reactions against immigrants if their numbers continue to grow is similarly managed through her use of commissive speech acts (e.g. "[...] if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in"; "[...] if we get them coming in at that rate people will turn round and we shall not have good race relations with those who are here")<sup>7</sup>.

## **6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: IMMIGRATION, THATCHERISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE ON THE HORIZON**

In this interview conducted in January 1978, Margaret Thatcher expresses her radical views on various issues including

unemployment, monetary policy, pay, housing, privatized and state industries, law and order or trade unions, all of which come to prefigure the discourse of Thatcherism that took full shape when the 'Iron Lady' became Prime Minister between 1979 and 1990. The first part of this interview herein focused on has proved to be especially significant of the part played by immigration in the articulation of Thatcherism. The novel combination of discourses (i.e. traditional Conservative discourse, populist discourse, neoliberal and economic discourse) characteristic of Thatcherism may already be observed in Thatcher's utterances when interacting with her interviewer for World in Action current affairs programme and discussing the issue of immigration. At a strictly textual level, Thatcher employs distinctive linguistic features of a populist quality (e.g. overwording<sup>8</sup> of the lexis of fear, pervasive references to 'people', strong modalities, inclusive first-person plural pronoun, etc.) helping the critical analysis to foretell the strong right-wing policies of her future governments. Immigrants are 'othered' in this respect and new cutbacks on immigration are estimated to be the only solution to the 'threat' that—to use Thatcher's own words in the interview—"this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture". Thatcher's use of commissive speech acts and presuppositions is likewise wholly consistent with the construction of her discourse of immigration and the populist tone that she adopts when immigrants are represented as a 'threat' to "[...] the British character [which] has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world [...]". And yet this view about immigration is made, as it were, absolutely explicit as she confidently asserts that "the moment the minority threatens to become a big one, people get frightened" in the form of "a categorical commitment [...] to the truth of the proposition" (Fairclough, 2001: 107) though an unmitigated statement in the simple present with no modality, that is, as though this were a universal truth.

In an overstated statement, Sir Evan Covel praises Thatcher's attitude as she "set her chin squarely against [...] self-seeking immigrants" (1987: 10). As substantiated by the Iron Lady's views in the interview examined, Covel's phrase—albeit certainly racist to many—somehow reveals Margaret Thatcher's tough stand on immigration in the UK. Thatcher's discourse on immigration is to be contextualized within British governments policies on immigration and nationality since the



early seventies. The interview anticipates Mrs Thatcher's governments' strong political action on the subject. As Lupton and Russell underline, her "government's increasingly restrictive approach is at the same time part of a well-established British preoccupation limiting the numbers of permanent black residents living in the UK with full citizen rights" (1990: 196). Throughout the interview, Thatcher makes reference to the need "[...] to hold out the prospect of an end to immigration except, of course, for compassionate cases". The Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1962 had first led a conservative government to control immigration from the Commonwealth, a position that was to be strengthened when Thatcher became Prime Minister with the 1979 Immigration Act, which "removed the automatic right of husbands and fiancés of women settled in the UK to join them, and further restrictions were introduced on the entry of parents, grandparents and children over 18" (Gardiner, 2000: 167)<sup>9</sup>.

Mrs Thatcher's outlook on immigration and nationality did not augur well for immigrants in the UK, since a new Immigration Act was to be passed in 1988 under her government which "further tightened controls, particularly on wives and children" (Gardiner, *ibid.*). Along with other elements like neo-liberalism, this restrictive policy on immigration and its patriotic counterpart, which—as illustrated by this TV interview—came to shape incipient Thatcherism, may be contextualized yet more broadly within the social and historic determinants leading to the success of Margaret Thatcher (first as leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 and then as Prime Minister between 1979 and 1990). As Wright emphasizes in his analysis of the 'Thatcher revolution' in the 1970s:

as the post-war settlement became unsettled under the pressures of accelerating inflation, rising unemployment and industrial strife (culminating in the notorious 'winter of discontent' of 1978-9), a 'new' right was its opportunity to wage an intellectual and political assault on the whole set of assumption that had underpinned post-war British politics, on both left and right. (2003: 40)

At the beginning of this TV interview for Granada TV, Gordon Burns challenges the leader of the Conservative Party to disclose details about the "considerable controversy and confusion in recent weeks

about possible new get-tough Tory policy over immigration", to which Mrs Thatcher replies by professing her commitment to further restrictions, "we do have to hold out the prospect of an end to immigration except, of course, for compassionate cases". By taking the Conservative Party "to the right of the political spectrum" (Cheshire et al., 2010: 67), the 'get-tough' policies announced by the 'Iron Lady' in the interview as early as 1978 concerning major social issues like immigration are but a prelude to the forthcoming development and implementation of Thatcherism in Britain during her years in office.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The interview in full may be consulted and downloaded from the archive of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation (TV Interview for Granada *World in Action* ('rather swamped'), 1978), its document ID on the online database being 103485. It may be directly accessed from the following website: <<http://www.margareththatcher.org/document/103485>> (last access: 7 December 2018). Granada Television was one the "15 ITV programme companies providing programmes in fourteen different regions" (Harvey, and Jones, 2002: 144) in the UK, Granada TV supplying programmes for north-west England (Oakland, 2002: 225).

<sup>2</sup> 'Lexical' or 'semantic field' refers to "a set of semantically related words whose meanings delimit each other and are said to cover a whole conceptual or objective field" (Bussmann, 1996: 274).

<sup>3</sup> Thatcher's defense of this 'British-centric' discourse is articulated on the basis of a clear distinction of ethnic groups as "social groups distinguished by a common culture and a strong sense of a shared identity based on religion, language and history" (Abercrombie, and Warde, 2007: 552).

<sup>4</sup> Contrary to 'exclusive we', which "refers to a group to which the reader [or hearer] does not belong", 'inclusive we' "to varying degrees includes the reader / hearer in the group referred to" (Goatly, 2000: 98).

<sup>5</sup> This constant mention of 'people' by Thatcher are undoubtedly significant of her populist style of politics, populist in politics often being associated with "a member of a political party that claims to represent ordinary people" (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*, 2005: 1075).

<sup>6</sup> In pragmatics "a presupposition is something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance" (Yule, 1996: 25).

<sup>7</sup> Taking a speech act as "an action performed by the use of an utterance to communicate" (Yule, 1996: 134), commissives are a category of speech acts "in which the speaker commits him or herself to some future action, e.g. a promise" (Yule, 1996: 128).

<sup>8</sup> The term 'overwording' refers to "an unusually high degree of wording, often involving many words which are near synonyms. Overwording shows preoccupation with some aspect of reality" (Fairclough, 2001: 96).

<sup>9</sup> Given the increasing number of immigrants from the former colonies, the traditional right of New Commonwealth citizens to British citizenship was thus subject to stronger and stronger immigration controls; until then, "the 1948 Nationality Act reaffirmed the right of British citizenship and free entry to the United Kingdom to all Commonwealth citizens and colonial subjects, without restrictions" (Cunliffe et al., 2004: 261).

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Título: "This Country Might Be Rather Swamped by People with a Different Culture": Inmigración en Gran Bretaña y la preconfiguración del discurso del thatcherismo a finales de los años 70