

FEAR, FRAMING AND FOREIGNERS:

The Othering of Immigrants in the Irish Print Media

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Biographical note:

Dr. Amanda Haynes, Dr. Eoin Devereux and Dr. Michael Breen are all sociologists at the University of Limerick with a specific research interest in mass media. They have been working since 2002 on a major project dealing with mass media treatment of the movement of new migrants into Ireland, particularly their representation and construction. To date, the research team has published 7 book chapters and refereed journal articles and 9 conference papers in this area, as well as convening research panels at refereed international and national conferences.

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Abstract

Recent public attitudes research indicates that Ireland has witnessed both an increase in levels of intolerance generally and in racism in particular. Using a frame analysis approach this paper examines how the Irish print media have responded to the new phenomenon of inward migration in Irish society. Drawing upon a sample of broadsheet and tabloid newspaper articles from 2002 we detail and discuss the significance of eight key frames (five negative and three positive) which, we argue, are prevalent within media content. Furthermore, we argue that the predominantly negative media coverage plays a crucial role in the generation of fear in Irish society about new migrants. We hold that we are witnessing, within media coverage, a public exercise in othering.

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Irish Print Media and the Othering of Immigrants

Introduction

In the last 15 years, in excess of 63,286 asylum seekers have sought refuge in Ireland, a complete reversal of the traditional outward migration pattern. In addition, inward migration in the last decade and a half has included returning Irish migrants, retirees (mainly from the UK) 'programme refugees' from the Balkans, refugees and labour migrants. In 2003, for example, 34,067¹ work permits were issued to labour migrants and between May 2004 and February 2005 a total of 68,688 migrants from the ten new EU accession states entered the Irish labour market.² This experience of inward migration represents a significant change for Irish society, an undeniable challenge to the established hegemonic self-imaging as a homogenous population. This shift in migration has been paralleled by increases in intolerance and rising levels of racism in Irish society. These developments have been empirically documented in part by the Irish data of the European Values Study (EVS)³ as well as in a number of Eurobarometer surveys.

In the EVS, respondents were asked to identify, from a prepared list, those categories of persons whom they would not want as neighbours. The categories included heavy drinkers, political extremists, criminals, drug addicts, large families, persons of a different race and migrant and foreign workers. In each category, there has been a rise in the level of intolerance between 1981 and 1999. In 1981, the percentage of respondents who listed at least three categories of persons they would not want as neighbours was 22%; in 1990 this had risen to 26.7% and in 1999 to 37.4%. While there is a general increase in intolerance, our specific interest in the context of this paper is in terms of attitudes to immigrants and foreign workers.

Percentages citing immigrants & foreign workers as unwanted neighbours have risen from 5.42% in 1981 to 12.52% in 1999; while this group is by no means the most frequently cited in terms of unwanted neighbour mentions, they are among those towards whom the largest increase in intolerance have been recorded over time. From a baseline of about 5% in 1981 and 1990, the percentage of respondents specifying immigrants and foreign workers as unwanted neighbours increased to 12.5% in 1999. These responses are strongly correlated with mentions of persons of a different race as unwanted neighbours ($r=.45$, $p<.001$) and mildly so with age ($r=.13$, $p<.001$).

We find equally interesting data in the Eurobarometer surveys. The 1992 survey demonstrates that 11% of the Irish sample stated that they found people of another race disturbing. The per cent finding people of another nationality disturbing increased from 8% in 1997 and to 17% in 2000. With regard to the EVS data, 5.1% of the Irish sample cited immigrants or foreign workers as unwanted neighbours in 1990. This increased to 12.1% in 1999-2000. Over the same time period the numbers citing people of a different race as unwanted neighbours increased from 5.9% to 12.4%. So

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both more than doubled. Among the 18-24 Age Cohort, those citing immigrants or foreign workers as unwanted neighbours in the EVS data increased from 2% in 1990 to 8.9% in 2000. As sociologists, we ask why is this so? We are particularly interested in examining how this recent example of social change has been played out in a media setting. We ask how the Irish print media have explained these changes? What sorts of media frames have been used in order to unpack what are complex social phenomena? What discursive cues have media professionals offered their diverse audiences in terms of reaching an understanding of inward migration?

Our interest is stimulated by a belief in the power of media as a force for influence in the formation of public opinion. While we acknowledge the power of the audience in interpreting texts according to the polysemic paradigm (Fiske, 1987), we also believe that encoded meanings are particularly significant and influential, capable of setting agendas and shaping public discourses (McCombs and Shaw, 1972, 1993; Kitzinger, 1999; Deacon *et al* 1999). In a significant contribution towards understanding the mass media's agenda-setting role in shaping public beliefs and opinion, through the use of framing, McCombs and Shaw note that

Agenda setting is considerably more than the classical assertion that the news tells us what to think about. *The news also tells us how to think about it.* (Our emphasis) Both the selection of objects for attention and the *selection of frames for thinking about these objects* (Our emphasis) are powerful agenda-setting roles. Central to the news agenda and its daily set of objects — issues, personalities, events, etc. — are the perspectives that journalists and, subsequently, members of the public employ to think about each object (1993, p.62).

McCombs and Shaw point to the significance of understanding the discursive cues or frames (both conscious and unconscious) that media professionals employ in communicating about particular phenomena. The concept of framing is widely acknowledged as originating with Goffman. Its application has, in more recent times, shifted quite significantly with its growing use within media analysis. In this context Entman defined frames and framing as follows:

To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. (1993:52)

Entman's definition places considerable weight on the power of media professionals to shape audience understandings (and interpretations) of social phenomena. We hold that this is particularly true in the context of how those who are socially distant are represented within media texts. Framing theory is particularly useful when come to try and understand the ideological and discursive power of the mass media.

In this paper we seek to identify and elaborate the frames that are embedded in newspaper texts in Ireland in the context of refugees and asylum seekers. As will later become evident, fear plays a significant and dominant role in much of the media construction of refugees and asylum seekers. Our emerging theorisation interprets the

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negative frames identified as a reproduction of historical othering discourses, leading to the construction of asylum seekers and refugees as a threat.

The ‘Construction, Conflation and Content’ Project

The wider research project from which this paper’s data is drawn involves a multi-method tri-partite analysis of media coverage of asylum seekers and refugees in Irish print and broadcast media. It builds upon an ongoing research interest into media coverage of poverty and social exclusion in the Republic of Ireland and one that has more recently begun to focus on how the Irish media have treated inward migrants, and asylum seekers and refugees in particular (Devereux, 1998; Devereux and Haynes, 2000; Devereux and Breen, 2003 & 2004; Haynes and Breen and Devereux 2005).

We wish to go beyond examining how the mainstream media industry have explained this recent example of social change and focus more particularly on how the media industry have facilitated a process of othering the inward migrant. A process, we argue, that has contributed in no small measure to a subsequent rise in negative public beliefs about immigrants.

Using a methodological approach that combines analyses of production, content and reception, the Conflation, Construction and Content project examines mainstream media coverage from January 1st 2000 to December 31st 2004. The project has assembled a print media archive of over 5,000 newspaper articles as well as radio and television programming. In considering how the Irish media industry has responded to the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees, the project concentrates on analyzing the perspectives of media professionals; the dominant discourses and frames within media content and the beliefs of audience members. This larger project examines news coverage from two broadsheets, two tabloid newspapers as well as material from radio and television. In combining as it does production, content and reception analysis, it is the first study of its kind to be undertaken within the field of Irish media and communications studies. The overall research project has three core objectives: (1) to provide hard data as to the role of media professionals in producing content on the issue of interest, the nature of such content, and the reactions of the audience; (2) to examine critically the objectivity and veracity of content on refugees and asylum seekers and (3) to summarize public perceptions and to indicate the role the media may play in the creation of such perception of refugees and asylum seekers.

In methodological terms the research project has three foci: the media professionals component to be investigated using semi-structured interviewing, the media content component to be analysed using both content and textual analyses, qualitative and quantitative, and the audience component to be executed using focus groups and the ‘news game’ as elaborated by the Glasgow University Media Group (Philo, 1993). The qualitative content analysis uses both discourse and frame analysis in order to examine the explicit and implicit meaning structures of the selected media texts. As noted in the introduction, our research project also draws upon Irish public attitudes data from two large-scale datasets, namely, the European Values Study and Eurobarometer.

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Paper Methodology

The methodological framework employed in this paper is now described. In examining the process of othering within the Irish print media we use a Frame Analysis approach (for an elaboration see Reese, 2001). We concentrate on newspaper coverage of asylum seekers and refugees from the year 2002 – a year in which the highest number of asylum applications to date (N = 11,530) were made in the Irish Republic. We explain how we arrived at our selected frames; how the newspaper articles were chosen and how they were subsequently coded.

Articles were sourced from LexisNexis, an electronic database of print media content. Through this medium it was possible to access four newspapers distributed within the Irish market; two broadsheets and two tabloids. Using a simple Boolean search term -- refugee! or (asylum w/1 seek!) -- stories dealing with refugees or asylum seekers and asylum seeking were extracted. The initial search yielded 507 stories of which 188 were deemed pertinent to this paper. These 188 stories were then categorized using the framework identified above. Both headlines and the key focus of the body of the article were considered during the coding process. Where either demonstrated conformity with the prepared frames they were coded as such. We remained open to the possibility that new frames would emerge, or that our prepared frames would not be represented in the texts. In total 11 articles were coded as incongruent with any of the prepared frames.

Eight Frames

Our analysis of the coverage of asylum seekers and refugees in Irish print media has produced five frames, which we argue act to ‘other’ these groups. Respectively, the five frames represent asylum seekers, refugees and the asylum system as inherently lacking in legitimacy; as a threat to the illusory and constructed homogeneity of national and local communities; as a moral and physical contaminant of the imagined Irish body; as an economic threat to the prosperity of the nation and individual Irish tax payers; and as a criminal element presenting a threat to the personal safety of the ‘legitimate’ Irish. We have identified three further frames which serve to deconstruct the divide between ‘them’ and ‘us’ – a positive frame wherein asylum seekers and refugees are exclusively depicted as contributors to Irish society; a support frame wherein racism and social closure are actively challenged; and a human interest frame, wherein asylum seekers and refugees are represented not as an amorphous mass, but as individuals with stories which evoke a sympathetic reaction among the readership. In the following sections the frames are elaborated and their representativeness supported through enumeration and the use of illustrative quotes.

Othering Frames

Frame One: The Illegitimacy of Asylum Seekers and Seeking

This first frame is representative of discourses, which fail to acknowledge the legitimacy of asylum seeking itself. The very terms ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘refugee’ are conflated and used interchangeably. Moreover, the asylum system is represented as a phenomenon to which Ireland has been subjected by external forces, rather than as an international function in which Ireland chose to participate for the furtherance of its own political goals⁴ This discourse reproduces and sustains a prioritisation of control

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and security over a rights-based approach in immigration policy (Mullally, 2001). Asylum seekers and refugees are depicted as a threat to the existing social order.

Fifty-nine of 188 articles framed asylum seekers and refugees in terms that challenged the legitimacy of asylum seeking and seekers.

Thirteen of the 59 articles centre upon the relationship between citizenship and childbirth. They were published during a period in which the right to residency of non-national parents of Irish citizens was subjected to challenge, and eventually overturned by the government in the Supreme Court on the 8th of April 2002. They reproduce discourses employed by those who attacked these entitlements, accusing asylum seekers of abusing Ireland's territorial basis for citizenship (later rescinded in a referendum in June 2004).

All but one of the articles contains unchallenged allusions to 'abuse' or attempted 'abuse' by asylum seekers. One refers to asylum seekers' attempts to challenge the ruling against non-national parents without pronouncing on the ruling itself. Typical headlines and quotes included the following⁵:

'I'LL END REFUGEE BABY BOOM LAW; MCDOWELL VOWS CRACKDOWN ON ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS' (T), 22/07/02

'REFUGEE IN BABY PLEA KICKED OUT' (T), 19/01/02

'...if the deportation order was lifted it would open the floodgates to pregnant women from all over the world.'

'6,000 REFUGEES MAY BE KICKED OUT; PARENTS WON'T GET ASYLUM FOR IRISH-BORN KIDS' (T), 09/04/02

'Last year the Department of Justice received 5,924 applications from asylum-seekers to remain here on the basis of 'parentage of an Irish citizen' – the vast majority of them from Nigerians.'

The necessity of altering our citizenship laws in order to prevent 'abuse' by asylum seekers is normalised, even in those articles that empathise with already resident parents and their Irish children. Qualification for a legal entitlement is thus represented as somehow fraudulent.

Six articles highlight the deportation of unsuccessful asylum seekers.

'FREE FLIGHT HOME FOR REFUGEES' (T), 23/11/01.

'£9MILLION BOOT; O'DONOGHUE AGREES NIGERIA DEAL TO KICK OUT BOGUS REFUGEES' (T), 29/09/01

'10,000 REFUGEES WILL BE THROWN OUT OF IRELAND IN JANUARY' (T), 29/12/01.

Articles commonly make reference to high numbers of unsuccessful asylum seekers, without any meaningful elaboration of the basis on which cases are determined.

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Those, which are more overtly negative, represent unsuccessful asylum seekers as fraudulent, failing to recognise that to have a case does not guarantee success. All of these articles normalise deportation. Arrangements with Romania and Nigeria to return asylum seekers on a voluntarily basis are framed as positive developments, without any reference to on-going human rights issues, such as female genital mutilation, in those countries.

The concept of 'illegal' entry is central to seven articles.

'IRELAND UNDER SIEGE: WAR ON REFUGEE MENACE; ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN VISA CRACKDOWN' (T), 21/02/02

'REFUGEE CARRIERS FACE FINE' (T), 7/10/02

'... fine airlines and ferry companies up to €3,000 for every asylum-seeker brought into Ireland illegally'

'DRIVERS BRIBED TO SMUGGLE REFUGEES; EXCLUSIVE' (T), 23/08/02

'Irish motorists are being bribed to take illegal immigrants across the border, it was revealed yesterday.'

The use of the term illegal is inherently problematic. These articles fail to recognise that the principle of non-refoulement⁶ extends to non-rejection at the frontier; that individuals may apply for asylum at any point during their stay in a country; or that under Article 31 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees asylum seekers may enter a country without proper documentation.

With the exception of one critical quotation from a refugee support group, the content of these articles does nothing to challenge the progressive criminalisation of entry without proper documentation or to illuminate for the readership the reasons why people fleeing persecution might not travel with same. Without this context, the role of the State and its delegates in preventing the entry of those without proper documentation is normalised rather than problematised.

A further seven articles highlight the evasion of deportation by asylum seekers. This group is conflated with immigrants who have overstayed their work visas in one of these. Two articles are ostensibly missing person stories where the person in question happens to be an asylum seeker; both chose to include as relevant information regarding trends in the evasion of deportation. The remaining four articles relate to data on the numbers of asylum seekers who have disappeared from the system or charges against those who have evaded deportation.

'WAR ON REFUGEES; 20 IMMIGRANTS IN COURT AFTER DAWN RAIDS BY GARDAI' (T), 17/07/02

'REFUGEES GO UNDERGROUND' (T), 29/07/02

'4,000 REFUGEES IN HIDING' (T), 01/10/01

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The article 'WAR ON REFUGEES; 20 IMMIGRANTS IN COURT AFTER DAWN RAIDS BY GARDAI' (T), 17/07/02) quotes a refugee support group critiquing the comparatively low proportion of asylum seekers who are granted either leave to remain on humanitarian grounds or refugee status in Ireland. Other articles relate to the same data as evidence of the 'high' number of 'bogus refugees'. Testaments by sources regarding the necessity of fingerprinting and of establishing the identity of all foreign nationals in the country are reproduced uncritically. The evasion of deportation is framed as a quantitatively and qualitatively significant threat.

Three articles make specific reference to fraud perpetrated by 'refugees' to secure entry into the country. Two refer to 'scams' to gain entry, although it is not clear that the accused ever were or intended to become asylum seekers. Certainly they were not refugees.

'ASYLUM UTD – REFUGEE SCAM NIGERIANS TELL IRISH CLUBS: 'WE CAN GET YOU A FIGO, RONALDO OR BECKS'' (T), 29/05/01.

The third article 'Tighter controls on would-be refugees signalled' (Broadsheet, 11/12/02) refers to government proposals to require asylum seekers to apply for refugee status at their point of entry. This development is represented as part of an effort to discourage 'fraudulent asylum applications' including those made by individuals already in the State. Should they come forward, the latter group would have to 'demonstrate why they were claiming assistance from the State'⁷ and, it is stated, may be subject to reduced welfare supports⁸. Although it is acknowledged that this measure could result in asylum seekers being turned away without being processed, there is no acknowledgement of their legal entitlement to seek asylum even if already resident within a country.

One instance of a 'green card marriage' merits three articles. A fourth article reports the introduction of a:

'REFUGEE BRIDE BAN' (T), 19/11/02

which reports on the impending introduction of a law preventing 'bogus marriages' between Irish citizens and 'refugees'. In fact, the groups on whom this law will have most impact are Irish citizens, or non-nationals with work visas, who are in life partnerships which do not have the legal status of marriage, including co-habiting lesbian, gay and heterosexual couples.

Two articles address the issue of trafficking broadly. Both are sympathetic to victims of related tragedies. However, trafficking itself is framed exclusively as a criminal activity, without reference to the significance of Irish immigration policy to encouraging its use.

Fourteen further articles centre upon a specific tragedy in which eight people died from suffocation when a container in which they were sealed went to Ireland instead of taking the shorter journey to the UK, which was its original destination. These articles are also highly sympathetic to the victims, but only two make any connection between trafficking and the difficulty of entering countries to seek asylum by safer

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means. None of the articles suggest a link between the incident and Irish immigration policy.

A letter to the editor of one of the selected broadsheets on 13/11/01, specifically challenged the legitimacy of asylum seekers from 'Romania, Poland and Nigeria', disseminating the viewpoint that individuals from such countries could not possibly merit refugee status. The remaining two articles consist of legal reports on challenges to the interpretation of asylum law and to the introduction of the tape recording of asylum seekers' hearings.

Ten of the 188 articles employ the term 'bogus' a descriptor which we would argue is irrelevant to reporting on asylum seekers, successful or unsuccessful.

Frame Two: Threat to National or Local Integrity

While the first frame represents a challenge to the legitimacy of asylum seeking, the second represents a fear of its implications for social and cultural cohesion.

The otherness of asylum seekers and refugees is highlighted through the uncritical reproduction of dichotomies between 'them' and the exclusionary construct that is the 'legitimate' Irish (Fanning, 2002) (an imagined homogeneous white, heterosexual, sedentary, Irish and Catholic population)⁹ (Tracey, 2001). Their marginalisation from this cultural construct is given material, political and legal reality through the fetishisation of citizenship. Through classification as non-citizens/non-nationals, asylum seekers' and refugees' construction as outsiders to both the national and local community, and significantly from access to many of the resources and opportunities available to citizens (Fanning, 2001), is legitimised. Discourses which dichotomise the entitlement of (deserving) Irish against the non-entitlement of asylum seekers and refugees are normalised to the point where they are immune to challenge in much print media coverage.

Twenty one articles were coded as framing asylum seekers and refugees as a threat to national or local integrity. 10 focused upon racism, or racist sentiments directed towards asylum seekers or refugees. Although many of these articles sought to highlight racism in order to counter it, Hartman and Husband (1974) have noted that by defining the inter-group situation as one of conflict, news media may depict the minority group as the source of the problem. This is particularly significant as discourses representing racism as ahistorical (Fanning, 2002) and non-nationals as a cause of racism are not uncommon in an Irish context. The repetition of racist comments may also be viewed as a means of their dissemination.

'CLLR SAYS REFUGEES BREED LIKE 'RABBITS' (T), 16/04/02

'Judge fines father €2,500 for going to Mosney Refugee Centre with shotgun' (B), 30/01/02

Eleven articles focused on the numbers of asylum seekers entering or reaching the country. Nine highlighted an increase in numbers. Only one mentioned any decrease numbers despite a fall in asylum applications in 2001. One article focused upon the fact that numbers had not fallen:

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‘REFUGEE SHAMBLES; EXCLUSIVE: THREE COUNTIES SWAMPED BY LION’S SHARE OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS’ (T), 07/09/01

‘More visas for refugee parents’ (B), 5/10/01

A total of ten articles of the 188, continued to use the term ‘influx’ or ‘flood’ despite an ongoing campaign by the Irish Refugee Council to highlight the negative implications of using such language.

Frame Three: The ‘Other’ as Contaminant

Othring has been conceptualised by Saïd (1991) as a political tool of imperialism. The Irish themselves were racialised in British print media to justify colonialism and its consequences. They in turn racialised Ireland’s indigenous Travelling Community whose assimilation was legitimised by their construction as a people in need of civilising. The same process is now being applied to asylum seekers and refugees, who are racialised and stereotyped to represent the degenerate other who, far worse than requiring the exportation of ‘civilizing influences’, are importing their otherness. We follow Meade’s (2001) conceptualisation of Ireland as a body which regards difference, as well as dissent, as an illness that threatens its integrity.

The framing of asylum seekers and refugees as contaminating to the Irish body is evident in the Irish print media. Their exoticised otherness is regarded as newsworthy; disease, extremism and sexual deviancy are all cited in headlines which also identify the ‘carriers’ of these physical and moral contaminants as asylum seekers and refugees. In this frame the ‘other’ represents not merely a future threat to the homogeneity of the community as in the previous frame, but an immediate threat to its legitimate members.

Twenty articles framed asylum seekers and refugees as a physical or moral contaminant. Nine of these represented asylum seekers as a potential health threat, citing the prevalence of AIDS, TB and other diseases or reporting calls for increased compulsory health screening, while one highlighted the prevalence of mental health difficulties:

‘67% of refugees health screened’ (B), 09/01/02

‘The guidelines issued last September recommended that screening be offered for tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, polio, and varicella zoster.’

‘AIDS TEST REFUGEES EVERY FRIDAY; FURY AS NOONAN PLEDGES TO SCREEN ‘ILLEGALS’ ‘ (T), 10/05/02

‘Quarantine at refugee camp’ (B), 7/12/02

With regard to the moral body, one article stressed the receipt of visas to travel for abortions, two focused upon the ‘problem’ of begging by asylum seekers, one identified individuals accused of attempted sexual assault as ‘refugees’:

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‘REFUGEES USE PORN IN BID TO LURE TEEN GIRLS; GARDA PROBE AFTER WORK EXPERIENCE PUPILS’ ORDEAL AT HOSTEL’ (T), 4/02/02

and one article, although about an unrelated court case, cited the affiliation of the plaintiff - an asylum seeker - to the voodoo religion.

Five further articles focused upon extremism among asylum seekers, four relating to reactions to the threat or execution of deportation orders and one to ‘political’ statements made by an intoxicated asylum seeker/refugee.

‘PRISON SUICIDE BID; CELL SOAKED IN BLOOD AS REFUGEE SLASHES ARM IN VALENTINE’S DAY HORROR’ (T), 17/02/02

‘Refugee ‘celebrated September 11th’ (B), 21/12/02

Frame Four: Asylum Seekers as a Criminal Element

The framing of asylum seekers and refugees as a threat to the national body, as in previous frames, is supplemented by their framing as a threat to (‘legitimate’ Irish) personal safety and private property. Stories about crime and conflict have repeatedly been found to be a major feature of press coverage of immigrant groups. (Hartmann and Husband, 1974; Scanlon, 1977) Racist stereotypes commonly invoke ‘fantasies related to dirt, danger, deviance, and crime’¹⁰.

In relation to this frame, we found that despite NUJ guidelines sub-editors and journalists alike have employed (barely) coded references to race, including nationality and status, as points of interest for their readership.

Thirteen articles identify individuals’ refugee/asylum-seeking status in relation to stories about crime. Eleven of these specifically cite the nationality or race of the accused in headline or body of the article.

Eleven of the 13 cite ‘refugees’ as alleged criminals:

‘Nigerian refugee fined for assault’ (B), 4/10/01.

‘GARDAI HUNT SUSPECT REFUGEE KNIFE KILLER; ALGERIAN WANTED FOR MURDER AND BENEFITS RIP-OFF’ (T), 11/02/02

‘He is wanted for a crazed attack in which a man was hacked to death with knives.’

‘FORMER REFUGEE ‘IS DRUG KINGPIN’’ (T), 19/08/02

‘A NIGERIAN¹¹ drugs baron ...’ ‘The Nigerian came to Ireland penniless and seeking refugee status.’

‘REFUGEE IS CHARGED WITH STAB MURDER (T), 15/08/01

‘A KOSOVAN¹² man ...’

‘REFUGEE IS SUSPECT IN SEX ATTACK ON BOY, 4; RAPE CASE GARDAI APPEAL FOR WITNESSES ‘ (T), 3/09/02

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‘GARDAI believe the pervert who sexually abused a four-year-old boy is a refugee. They are still hunting the attacker, who officers say is of African appearance.’

The remaining two articles focus on refugees/asylum seekers as victims. However, in both cases the complicity of non-nationals in the crime is made apparent.

Frame Five: Asylum Seekers as an Economic Threat

As the first frame normalised the privileging of citizens, articles coded under this frame accept unquestioningly the citizenry’s fundamental entitlement to preferential access to resources and to their control. Moreover, the asylum seeker/refugee is constructed as a scapegoat for the structural inequalities generated by our own economic and social system, which exclude many legal citizens from full social citizenship. Their disadvantage is commonly blamed instead upon the diversion of funds to providing asylum.

Seven articles specifically highlight the cost of asylum:

‘@1M¹³ A WEEK HOTEL BILL FOR REFUGEES; SHOCK COST OF HOUSING ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN B&BS’ (T), 20/09/02.

‘BERTIE’S GIFT GRUB TO REFUGEES; EXCLUSIVE 35,000 ASYLUM-SEEKERS GET VIP MENU ‘ (T), 16/01/02.

Four further articles link asylum seekers to strains upon the health system:

‘MICHEAL: REFUGEES BEHIND BEDS CRISIS’ (T), 16/10/01.

‘MATERNITY HOSPITAL HIT BY REFUGEE BABY BOOM; TOP DOC PREDICTS ‘DOOMSDAY’ CRISIS’ (T), 6/08/01.

Three articles focus on either accusations of social welfare fraud by asylum seekers/refugees or an argument that state benefits to these groups are overgenerous:

‘FREE CARS FOR REFUGEES; CASH GRANTS BUY BMWs’ (T), 16/09/02.

‘REFUGEE CHEATS COST STATE EUR16M; WELFARE SCAMS ARE ‘RIFE’’ (T), 01/04/01.

Human Interest, Positive and Supportive Coverage Frames:

Three additional frames were identified – a human-interest frame, a positive frame and a support frame.

Eighteen stories were categorised as congruent with the human-interest frame. In such stories asylum seekers and refugees are humanised and individualised, providing a counterweight to their frequent amorphous representation. This sympathetic focus on

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individuals may not, however, be sufficient to counter stereotypes. The individual is often selected for notice because they are viewed as exceptional. Furthermore, as in media coverage of Third World issues, there is a tendency to frame the real 'heroes' of these stories as the white Irish middle-class who have assisted/supported/highlighted the other. (for an elaboration see Devereux, 1998)

Nine of the 18 stories addressed individuals or families facing deportation:

'HAS THE MINISTER GONE MAD? HE'S KICKED OUT A REFUGEE WHO WAS A BUS DRIVER FOR THREE YEARS & HADN'T CLAIMED STATE BENEFIT SINCE 1999; ANDREI SENT BACK TO ROMANIA' (T), 28/06/01.

'Minister rejects family's refugee case plea.' (B), 13/11/02.

The remaining articles focus on such issues as family separation and reunification.

Forty articles were found to be congruent with the support frame. Articles coded under this frame highlight overt anti-racist arguments, focus on the Irish immigration system as overly restrictive and highlight a link between Irish immigration policy and trafficking. Deprivation resulting from Ireland's system of direct provision is also prominent. Significantly, 32 of the articles coded under the support frame are based on statements by NGOs, religious groups or political figures and a significant percentage (one third) are presented as non-news items (opinions, features, comments, letters to the editor etc.).

In total only three articles present asylum seekers or refugees in a solely positive light, without reference to conflict, crime or controversy. One article focuses on their participation in a State-sponsored educational programme, one relates the successful local integration of two young asylum seekers and the third highlights the participation of a group of asylum seekers in a tidy town competition:

'REFUGEES TIDY TOWN' (T), 7/06/02.

Discussion: Framing the other for power and privilege

The construction of an other is, in fact, a dual process whereby an imagined included us is created through the construction of an excluded other (Hall, 1997). Ultimately, othering is an exercise in power. Its potency lies in its potential to construct divisions, hierarchies and exclusions. It is a tool wielded by the empowered in-group who by definition retain the agency to construct, while the other is merely constructed.

We construct the other as that which we are not; indeed, as the relief against which we define ourselves. As such, any construction of an in-group requires the definition of an out-group other. Definitions of us and them are mutually dependent; we cannot exist without reference to and definition of the other. However, the parameters of in-groups and out-groups - the divisions between 'us' and 'them' - are not naturally occurring, but socially constructed. Where we choose to construct those borders is of

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great significance to understanding the social function of specific othering processes and their relationship to the production and maintenance of inequalities:

What is socially peripheral is often symbolically centred. (Babcock, 1978: 32, in Hall, 1997).

Although the process is ostensibly about the other, when we select the social locations where we will draw the lines between us and them, it is ourselves we are revealing. We define othering as the process by which we delimit and define us by delimiting and defining them. We view this as a process by which we unknowingly disclose ourselves.

Othering as the creation of a hierarchy

Constructing the other requires categorisation. The in-group and out-group do not exist without characterisation to differentiate and separate. We construct our differentiation from the other through assigning us and them to different, opposing, categories of characteristics. Indeed, in defining ourselves against a constructed other, we engage in a process of classification through the use of value-laden binary oppositions, such as normal/abnormal, healthy/pathological, acceptable/taboo. We do not merely assign people to categories, we assign values to those categories. The creation of hierarchical relations is inherent to the process of othering:

Symbolic boundaries are central to all culture. Marking 'difference' leads us, symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatise and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal (Hall, 1997: 237).

We follow Derrida's argument that in examining dichotomies of us/them:

we are not dealing with ... peaceful coexistence, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the terms governs ... the other or has the upper hand. (1972: 41, cited in Hall, 1997: 258)

The inequity of othering

Hall (1997) notes that power relationships, although often unequal, are commonly reciprocal. Many power relations require some degree of interaction – some relationship – for one to impose one's will upon another. This relationship, by its very nature, lends some capacity for action to those over whom power is being exerted. At least the potential for resistance or non-cooperation can be imagined, however unsustainable the consequences of acting upon it may be.

It is arguable that the particular significance of othering as a tool for the production and maintenance of inequality, lies in the anonymity with which it can be exercised. Those who control the (re)production of othering discourses may exclude those whom they other without the existence of a reciprocal relationship. This one-way process is facilitated by the fact that the other is constructed by the in-group, for the in-group, with reference only to the in-groups needs and with a requirement for this construction to be accepted by the in-group only. We are the knower - they are the known.

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Indeed, if one accepts that the intended message about an out-group is more likely to be assimilated without negotiation where there is the absence of direct social contact with members of that group (thus precluding the direct acquisition of alternative information), the othering process is in fact facilitated by the absence of any relationship between the in-group and out-group. In this context, the other is the ultimate object. Their categorisation occurs in their absence:

Stereotyping tends to occur where there gross inequalities of power. (Hall, 1997: 258)

The construction of the other is a process through which we produce, legitimate and consume discourses about the other on a self-referential basis. As the excluded, the other is peripheral to this process.

The construction of asylum seekers/refugees as other

The negative frames which we have identified suggest that two related historical devices, racialisation and ferment, are identifiable in the contemporary othering of refugees and asylum seekers.

Racialisation is a key lens through which othering may occur. Miles defines it as:

A process of delineation of group boundaries and of allocation of persons within those boundaries by primary reference to (supposedly) inherent and/or biological (usually phenotypical) characteristics (1993: 74-75).

Although references to race are, we would argue, more coded in the texts which we have analysed, as often is the case in contemporary society (Valji, Harris and Simpson, 2004) their implicit presence is nonetheless discernable. Asylum seekers and refugees are constructed as an amorphous mass through the conflation of the terms between headline and body of articles. The group is anonymised (and dehumanised) in the negative frames, in contrast to their constructions in human interest, positive and, to a lesser extent, support frames. Individual, cultural and national diversity are disappeared through identification with the label asylum seeker/refugee; yet implied racial differences are integrated into this label through its co-location with citations of various minority national and ethnic identities.

The construction of the 'asylum seeker/refugees mass' facilitates their juxtaposition with the 'legitimate' Irish and their creation as the Irish's other. A conceptual divide between asylum seekers/refugees and the 'legitimate' Irish, wherein the former are constructed as an in-group against the asylum/refugee seeker other, is made possible.

Through detailed description of the negative frames we have identified the categorisation of the amorphous asylum seeker/refugee mass as pathological. For those who have studied the pathologising of people of colour, or the racialisation of the Irish themselves, these motifs will be all too familiar. Categorisation as irredeemable (incapacity to integrate), as a cause of racial conflict, as undeserving (illegitimate), as unproductive, as criminal, immoral and diseased were also integral to the discourses which racialised and othered these groups.

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As is common to historical processes of racialisation, the categories with which asylum seekers and refugees are identified – the means through which they are othered, are fear-generating. The negative frames, which are applied to asylum seekers and refugees, depict them as a threat to the in-group. Their presence is represented as threatening our social stability, our economy, our personal safety, our moral sanctity and physical health, our cultural cohesion. Their very entry to the country is represented as a threat to the integrity of our borders, the rule of law and the protective cloak of invisibility which we imagined hid us from the gaze of the majority world beyond the borders of Fortress Europe. That a sizeable proportion of the Irish population have assimilated the message of fear is evidenced by the high turnout to participate in the citizenship referendum of 2004, where we altered our definition of citizenship from one based upon territorial, to one based upon ethnic, grounds. The proposal to alter our constitution (even to the determinant of potential citizens in the North of our island) in order to ‘protect ourselves’ against the immigrant threat was passed by a significant majority.

Fear as a facilitator of the othering process

We would argue that the construction of a threat - the generation of fear of the other - can be seen as integral to the process of othering. The construction of an other, is the construction of abnormality and taboo, of a:

‘threat[ening] to the cultural order’ (Hall, 1997).

Historically, there is support for an association between fear and the triggering of othering processes. Skeggs (1997) describes how the othering of the working class in Victorian Britain occurred in response to middle-class fears of revolution sparked by the revolt of the working classes in France. However, it is important to highlight that the Victorians’ fears emanated from their position of privilege, not from the working classes per se. Their pre-eminent fear was of loss of that position of privilege. The originator threat was that of *égalité*.

The other must be constructed as fearful to be feared. The othering process by its very nature will focus upon stereotyping those who are already weakened by a position of inequality, those who are already sufficiently peripheral to prevent a successful challenge to their construction as other.

As such, the fear that stimulates othering is, we hold, fear, not so much of others as for ourselves. While this is a fine distinction to draw, it is a significant one. The source of the fear which stimulates the already advantaged to other the already marginalized must be critically interrogated. We argue here that the source of that fear is the position of privilege which those with the power to other occupy. The threat that triggers othering is a threat to their advantaged position.

Fear has the capacity to unite and call to (irrational) action, as well as exclude. The other is constructed as a threat to marshal the members of the in-group to defend their unequal control over resources and opportunities. The hierarchical construction of the other as lesser and deserving serves to legitimate their exclusion from equal participation. The negative frames identified in this analysis are devices in a process

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of (re)presentation whose ultimate consequence is to exclude asylum seekers and refugees from access to resources & opportunities thus retained for the exclusive use of the in-group.

The Flexibility of Othering Discourse

Significantly, asylum seekers and refugees have been substituted for 'indigenous' groups such as single mothers and welfare recipients, who have traditionally been framed as the 'devil's poor' or 'undeserving poor', in Irish media discourse. This is despite the unedited transferral of some othering categorisations directly from these groups to asylum seekers and refugees (for instance the framing of the groups as an unproductive economic drain).

In the post-Celtic Tiger era of prosperity, the in-group has expanded its (metaphorical) borders to include traditionally othered indigenous Irish in order to legitimate a territorially based argument against the inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees. Though themselves others, the less numerous needy within its borders, can still be used to support the exclusionary discourses of the in-group. Our indigenous others are brought out (temporarily redeemed) to create a juxtaposition between our (temporarily) deserving needy and the undeserving and non-entitled non-national other.

This is not dissimilar from the process highlighted by Skeggs (1997) through which the Victorian working class, while constructed as other to, and lesser than, the middle classes were nonetheless included in the wider imperial in-group, and hierarchically defined as superior to the non-national other, in order to gain their support for the colonial process. Othering constructions are a powerful tool of privilege.

Conclusion

The findings of this paper raise serious questions about the way in which some sections of the Irish print media have responded to the issues surrounding recent inward migration. The paper finds that the bulk of media coverage makes use of negative frames when communicating about immigrants. We argue that beyond the sensationalist headlines lies an othering process that is fundamentally concerned with the spread of fear (and confusion) amongst the public. Immigrants are blamed in terms of scarcer state resources for essential public services. The cost of inward migration is constructed as a serious threat to the recent unprecedented economic prosperity (for some) associated with the Celtic Tiger. What we are witnessing within media coverage is a public exercise in othering.

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¹ Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

² Source: Department of Family and Social Affairs.

³ The European Values Study is a pan-European project that utilises an omnibus survey focusing especially on values associated with work, religion, lifestyles and other issues. It runs roughly once a decade; so far, surveys have taken place in 1981, 1990 and 1999/2000.

⁴ See Ward (1996).

⁵ Throughout the article, headlines are presented in lowercase or capitals as they appeared in Lexis-Nexis. Direct quotations from the body of articles are italicised to distinguish them from headlines. The cited headlines and quotations from the body of the articles are differentiated in terms of whether they are from a tabloid or broadsheet by means of (T) for Tabloid and (B) for Broadsheet.

⁶ ‘The legal principle of non-refoulement is binding on all states as a matter of customary international law and is expressly included in the Irish Refugee Act. Non-refoulement prohibits states from sending a person back to a country in which they may face serious human rights abuses’. www.amnesty.ie

⁷ i.e. asylum.

⁸ The article did not specify which welfare supports were at risk, but made reference to an announcement by UK authorities that they planned to exclude asylum-seekers, who had not applied for asylum on first arriving at a port, from state welfare benefits and accommodation.

⁹ To which ‘able-bodied and male’ could arguably be added.

¹⁰ <http://www.exchangehouse.ie/ireland.htm>

¹¹ The capitalization of the word ‘Nigerian’ is as it appears in the body of the article.

¹² The capitalization of the word ‘Kosovan’ is as it appears in the body of the article.

¹³ M = Million.