No racists here: Public Opinion and Media Treatment of Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

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"For much of last week, the Southern Health Board's hard-pressed immigration staff spent their time trying to run to ground two completely unfounded rumours which had gained popular currency. One concerned an asylum-seeker who was said to have bought himself a car using a cheque made out in his name by the local authorities. The story was that his children had been subjected to racial insults on the school bus and he had asked for and received money to buy a car so as to shield them from such torments.

The other concerned a Cork woman who was astounded to see that the asylum-seeker in front of her in the supermarket had a trolley laden with sweets, biscuits and other goodies, everything except nutritious food for her children. When the eavesdropper heard the checkout girl suggest she would be better off spending her money on decent food, she was just as astounded to hear the lady reply that it was her child's birthday and the immigration authorities had given her the money to help celebrate it." (Dick Hogan, the <u>Irish Times</u>, January 29th 2002)

Introduction

Since 1992 more than 50,000 asylum seekers and refugees have arrived in Ireland[1]. The reversal of traditional outward Irish migration patterns has proven to be politically controversial and the source of much contention amongst some members of the Irish public. From the outset it is worth remarking that in spite of a modest amount of discussion on asylum seekers and refugees, (specifically in relation to the proposal that all asylum seekers and refugees should undergo compulsory health screening) the 2002 General Election saw the mainstream political parties in Ireland adopting a position of consensus by largely avoiding the question altogether. This avoidance is paralleled in the academy. With just a few notable exceptions (Gray, 1999; MacGreil, 1996; Peillon, 2000; Lentin and MacVeigh, 2002) there has been a virtual silence – in research terms at least – from the Irish academic community on the many issues that have affected recent asylum seekers and refugees. We have had to rely upon media commentators for analysis of the Irish response (Cullen, 2000) and more particularly for a critique of how the media have treated asylum seekers and refugees (Pollak, 1999).

The experience of inward migration in Ireland, after decades of emigration, represents a stark change in social reality. It is imperative that this change, in all its aspects, is analysed from a critical perspective, with particular reference to the mass media and their role in shaping public opinion on this issue. In furtherance of this, this chapter considers how the Irish media construct stories about asylum seekers and refugees. By way of comparison, we also deal with the issue of media coverage of the indigenous Irish ethnic minority, the Travelling Community. Our work draws upon research undertaken in the periods 1992-1996 and 2000-2001 and stems from an ongoing interest in the ideological role played by the mass media. It draws upon a neo-Marxist theoretical framework. We are specifically focused on the relationship between media representation of marginalized and socially excluded groups, of which immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and travellers are prime examples and the formation of public opinion in relation to these groups. Our interest is stimulated

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[1] Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner.

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).

Our approach is influenced by the work of the Dutch scholar Teun van Dijk. Adopting a critical anti-racist perspective, van Dijk has undertaken detailed discourse analyses of the print media's role in reproducing racist ideologies in the Dutch and British press (van Dijk, 1998a; 1998b; 1990 1988). Van Dijk's approach recognizes the importance of examining the connections between unequal power relations in society (in this instance in terms of ethnicity), media content and public or audience attitudes and beliefs. Thus, the findings emanating from his discourse analysis of media texts are related to measured public attitudes and beliefs about ethnicity. His study <u>Racism and the Press</u>, for example, seeks to explain how: '…white in-group members tend to express and communicate their ethnic attitudes to other members of the group and how such attitudes are spread and shared in society' (1990:6). Van Dijk's research is based upon detailed and systematic analysis of the print media's role in the reproduction and circulation of dominant ideological interpretations of race and ethnicity.

We begin by setting the context for Irish social research in the present time, drawing upon previous research on media coverage of poverty in Ireland by way of example, and apply the findings of that research to new data based on content analyses of more recent media coverage as well as data drawn from the Irish cohort of the 1999/2002 <u>European Values Study</u> (EVS).

Finally, we argue for an increase in awareness among the public in general and powerful elites in particular, with a view to ensuring that public policy and public discourse are informed by hard fact rather than impression, rumour and hearsay.

Defining asylum seekers and refugees

Within much media and public discourse the terms asylum seeker and refugee are often used interchangeably and problematically. This has caused considerable confusion. A refugee is a person who fulfils the requirements of Article 1(A) of the <u>1951 Geneva Convention</u>. A person should be recognised as a 'refugee' where s/he can show a well-founded fear of persecution in his/her country of origin on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. An asylum seeker is a person seeking refugee status under the criteria stipulated in the <u>1951 Geneva Convention</u>. Asylum seeker status is a temporary status conferred on individuals while the host government determines an individual's right to refugee status. Under the laws currently in force in Ireland asylum seekers are not permitted to engage in paid employment unlike refugees who are. The numbers involved worldwide are high as seen in Table 1, supplied by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR).

Table 1 Refugees worldwide by Region (UNHCR, 2001).

Estimated Number of Persons of Concern who fall under the Mandate of UNHCR - 1st January 2002	
Asia	8,820,700
Europe	4,855,400
Africa	4,173,500
Northern America	1,086,800
Latin America & Caribbean	765,400
Oceania	81,300
TOTAL	19,783,100

Media content does matter

An appreciation of how and why we should analyse media content is important for a number of key reasons. First, media content is a powerful source of meaning about the social world (Dahlgren, 1981; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987, and Breen, 2000). Take, for example, how ethnic minorities are represented in a media setting. That media coverage tends to problematize minorities is confirmed by a large number of studies. Gomes and Williams (1990), for example, examine how the media construct a connection between race and crime. Soubiran-Paillet (1987) investigated the representation of minorities in crime reports in the French and Swiss press. Other examples abound of ethnic association with negative reporting about crime (Winkel, 1990). Importantly, this kind of media coverage has been found to be of significance in the shaping of public attitudes towards minority groups such as refugees or asylum seekers (Schaffert, 1992).

Second, while media content does not equate with social reality, it is essential that we examine how media content represents, or more accurately 're-presents', the realities involved in social, economic and political relationships. Given the apparent shrinkage of media content of a more critical nature – owing in no small part to the growing concentration and conglomeration of media ownership in the hands of a few (Bagdikian, 2000) – this issue is particularly germane. It is important to determine whose or what version of 'reality' we mainly see or hear about in a media setting. The predominance of a hegemonic discourse about class, ethnicity or gender can readily have a bearing on what audiences believe about the social world. This is especially true of those who are marginalized, and usually without access to media.

Agenda setting theory

The Irish people are well served, in the main, by the media and by the high quality of journalism found in radio, television, and the broadsheet newspapers. Such media are seen are seen as reliable and trustworthy, and media coverage of events is a measure of relative importance to Irish society. The public has an expectation, rightly, that the media will report fairly and accurately, without bias, on what is occurring that affects society. Media consumers use media content to exercise a surveillance function of society, relying on the media to tell them those things of import of which the public might otherwise remain ignorant. Such surveillance comes at a price: as Cohen puts it 'the press…may not be successful in telling people what to think but it is stunningly successful in telling them what to think about' (1963).

Iyengar and Kinder's work on agenda setting in television news indicates that news coverage affects the mass public's approach to major issues. Their studies show that the people most prone to agenda setting effects are those who are neither politically active nor strongly affiliated with a political party. Significant non-political news items, then, are relatively easily placed in the public consciousness. The clear consequence of agenda setting theory is that it is the framers of the news who wield a vast amount of control over how the public views various events and personalities.

As well as setting the agenda for public issues, the news media can also set the agenda for themselves by their repetitious coverage of a single event and their definition of newsworthiness. People, including journalists, cannot pay attention to everything; they are selective. They take shortcuts by relying on the most accessible information sources. Frequent repetition of a given story at a national level focuses journalistic attention on that issue. The framing of a news story, therefore, is of critical importance in terms of the ultimate impact of such a story.

Rogers and Dearing subdivide agenda setting into three specific components: media agenda setting, public agenda setting, and policy agenda setting (1988, p. 556). The first of these results in

homogenization of news content, the second indicates media influence of public opinion, and the

third indicates some level of influence on the elites who control public policy.

McCombs and Shaw (1993) point out that the metaphor of agenda setting incorporates other

communications concepts such as status conferral, stereotyping and image. It is precisely these

dimensions of agenda setting that generate public attitudinal change. Media coverage can set an

agenda and can also alter public perceptions of the players in the process depending on the type of

coverage (Brewer & McCombs, 1996).

The public can only make decisions on the information that it has at its disposal. Iyengar (1991)

refers to the 'accessibility of information'which is highly dependent on the pattern of news

coverage (p. 132). While it is clear that other elements enter into the accessibility equation, such as

party affiliation, socio-economic status, personal values, religious orientation, and cultural

perceptions, Iyengar argues that accessibility of information on public affairs in primarily

dependent on media content. One recent of example of this in practice related to the different

outcomes in the Nice referenda held in Ireland in 2001 and 2002. In 2001 the Irish people rejected

the Nice treaty by a significant margin, much to the consternation of many political leaders at home

and abroad. A comfortable majority carried the second referendum, held in October 2002. What had

changed in the interim? The Irish people's experience of the Nice treaty issues was mostly

mediated. It was the media coverage of the referendum campaign that ultimately sourced the

electorate's knowledge about the treaty. A key element of the debate was the question of migrant

labour, specifically in relation to the potential loss of jobs by Irish nationals to incoming migrants.

Demonising the poor

The practice of demonising certain sections of the poor is not new and the Irish media are not alone in this regard. Golding and Middleton, for example, in their studies Making Claims: News Media and the Welfare State (1979) and Images of Welfare (1982) investigate media generated moral panics about alleged welfare abuse in the UK. During their six-month content analysis based study, Golding and Middleton (1979) found that welfare issues, as such, did not make the news. Significantly, welfare was only considered worthy of coverage when it was connected to other issues such as crime, fraud or sex. A key theme uncovered in their analysis – and developed further in their 1982 study – was that the poor are constructed in a media context as either deserving or undeserving. They examine the case of a man that the British print media dubbed 'King Con' who was found to be engaged in social welfare fraud. What is striking about this case is the extent to which the media emphasise that this is merely the tip of the iceberg and that welfare fraud is widespread. Media demonisation of certain sections of the underclass has contributed in no small way towards legitimising both welfare cutbacks by the state and the furtherance of hegemonic ideologies about the poor and underclass.

All of the published research on attitudes to poverty in Ireland (Table 2) reveals two main kinds of constructions within public discourse: Those who deserve support (The Deserving, or God's, Poor) and those who do not deserve any support (The Undeserving, or Devil's, Poor). The published research on public beliefs about the causes of poverty reveals that while structural explanations are on the increase, explanations that seek to explain poverty in terms of an individual's personal or cultural characteristics remain potent.

Table 2. Summary of principal findings on public attitudes to poverty in Ireland 1984-1996

Davis et al (1984)	Eurobarometer (1990)	McGreil (1977) & (1996)
Irish are strongly fatalistic about causes of poverty. 57% of sample agreed that 'lack of ambition is the root of poverty.' 53% agreed that 'the majority of people on the dole have no interest in getting a job.' 60% believed that 'Itinerants' were untrustworthy, careless, excitable and noisy. 23% believed that the unemployed had these characteristics.	Public opinion in Ireland, Denmark and the UK was found to be negative in terms of public beliefs about the poor making it through their poverty. In Ireland, while structural explanations for poverty were strong, ones which blamed individuals for their poverty were also in abundance – e.g. Alcoholism/drugs: 39% Broken families: 33% Too many children: 19% Laziness: 16%	The former study points to negative public attitudes to both the Travelling Community and the Unemployed. The more recent study (1988-89 period) argues that negative public attitudes to Travellers have intensified. They were shown to have lessened where the unemployed were concerned. 11.8% of McGreil's sample in 1988-9 agreed with the statement 'The poor person is generally responsible for his/her own poverty.'

The 1999/2000 EVS data do not give any reason to think that the attitude of blame has change significantly in relation to those who are without work. As can be seen in Table 3, significant numbers of respondents are strongly supportive of attitudes that seem to reflect very negatively on those without work.

Table 3 Respondents' attitudes to work questions in Irish EVS data, 2000.

It is humiliating to receive money without having to work for it	47.6% agree/strongly agree
People who don't work turn lazy	57.1% agree/strongly agree
Work is a duty towards society	60.1% agree/strongly agree
People should not have to work if they don't want to	56.5% disagree/strongly disagree

We know from McGreil's research in relation to unemployment at the end of the 1980s, when, conservatively, unemployment peaked at 18%, that attitudes softened, without any corresponding softening towards groups like travellers. At a time of increased prosperity, 30% of Irish respondents in the EVS data suggest that the primary reason for people living in need is laziness or lack of willpower. This specific attitude of blame is statistically correlated with negative attitudes to work listed above.

These attitudes are reflected in media coverage. This is documented in Devereux's (1998) study of the national broadcaster's coverage of poverty on RTE1 and Network 2 channels. He combined critical content analysis with an ethnographic approach and examined factual, fictional and fund-raising television. The particular focus was on the ideological construction of poverty stories. The study concluded that poverty coverage on television is constructed in such a way as to be non-threatening to the status quo. It has therefore a significant role to play in the reproduction of dominant ideological discourses about poverty. "RTE's coverage … draws upon the dominant, liberal ideology which is in circulation in Irish society. Television coverage of poverty is defined by limits which disallow any reference to the unequal social structure (itself a key cause of poverty) and never challenges those who occupy positions of power and domination" (Devereux, p. 138).

Media coverage of refugees & asylum seekers

The changing circumstances of the Irish economy from 1996-2000, together with the emergence of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy, has resulted in indigenous poverty effectively disappearing from the media, only to be replaced by a 'new poor' - immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This has been typified by a series of newspaper articles, with particularly sensationalist headlines, as documented by Pollock (1999). Table 4 indicates the type of headline seen frequently in the Irish press.

Table 4. Sample Irish Newspaper Headlines about Refugees and Asylum Seekers[2]

5000 Refugees Flooding into Ireland
Floodgates open as a new army of poor floods the country
Gardaí Increasingly Worried About Refugees in Street Crime and Prostitution
A New Determined Style of Beggar
Demand for curb on tide of ' refugees'
Refugee Children in Care to Top 1,500
Refugee children sold as sex slaves
Mother's anguish as junkie daughter marries Nigerian refugee for £5,000 in asylum scam
Blitz on refugees' sham marriages
Refugee rip-off is revealed
Government crackdown on bogus asylum-seeker advisers
Refugees Flooding Maternity Hospitals
Refugee Rapist on the Rampage

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[2] The sample of headlines in based on the work of Pollock (1999) and Devereux & Breen (2001).

Tax- Payers Face Bills of £20m +
Crackdown on 2000 Sponger Refugees
Inmates lobby to stay in jail as refugees fill up hotels
Refugee Flood to Spark Homes Crisis
Alert on Bogus Refugee Weddings
Refugee Tried To Bite Me to Death

From 'King Con' to 'Con Artists'…

The quotations from the <u>Irish Times</u> at the beginning of this chapter do not represent an isolated incident. Stories of the type to which the Irish Times refers are currently in wide circulation. As late as October 2002, in the run-up to the Nice referendum, these stories surfaced a number of times. The level of concern was such that the Minister for Social and Family Affairs directed officials in her department to make enquiries at a number of Health Boards around the country on foot of allegations that some asylum seekers were in receipt of special grants for the purchase of cars. On September 16 2002 the <u>Irish Mirror</u> ran a story about refugees buying cars with government cheques. 'Free cars for refugees: Cash grants buy BMWs' read the headline. The thrust of the article was the refugees were using monies obtained for assistance to purchase second-hand cars 'including BMWs and Toyotas.' The article 'revealed' that one refugee site was 'full of second-hand cars.' One politician was quoted as stating: 'it does not set a good example and is sure to infuriate other young people in this country who cannot afford to buy a car.'

An editorial the same day denounced the 'money grabbing' 'con artists' who were 'cruising around Ireland' and condemned the government for the legislative loophole that facilitated these 'rogue refugees'. The next day the same paper ran a further story titled 'Probe into car scandal' in which it announced a government inquiry following the previous day's story. An inquiry did take place, as indicated above, with the Minister subsequently announcing: "… no evidence has been found to support such allegations." This went unreported by the <u>Irish Mirror</u>.

What exactly is going on here? It is evident that these stories continue to circulate despite official denials and denunciations. If we consider the possibilities we can see that there are three alternative explanations. The first is that what we are seeing is a simple manifestation of visibility, wherein refugees, specifically those whose country of origin in clearly not Ireland, are seen to be driving cars, with a consequent leap to conclusion that falls wide of the mark. In fact, there are in excess of 38,000 foreign nationals on work permits in Ireland and these may be confused in the minds of some with refugees or asylum seekers. Second, there is a possibility that some people who have received legitimate assistance from the government have decided that the best use to be made with some of the received monies is the purchase of a second-hand car. That in no way negates their right to support. There are shades here of historical comments about refusals to help the poor because they might spend the money on alcohol. Thirdly, what we could be seeing here is a media based exhibition of national xenophobia, in which cultural stereotypes and caricatures are perpetuated. This latter view is initially supported by a simple review of the headlines we have quoted above. It is also supported by the experience of Travellers in Ireland and specifically by media coverage of this group.

Media Coverage of Travellers in Ireland

Travellers generally see themselves as Irish people with a separate identity, culture and history. They constitute between 0.5 and 1.0% of the national population. Aspiring to a nomadic lifestyle, they remain for the most part a marginalised group in Irish society. This marginalisation is often reflected in the media representation of travellers. There is a long history of problematizing Travellers in a media setting (Devereux, 1998). Until its funding ceased in November 2002, the Citizen Traveller campaign attempted to counter hegemonic representations of Travellers in a media setting through using a billboard and radio advertising campaign.

No Racists Here…

In 2002, as Ireland was becoming increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse, all of the children in a national school in Galway were withdrawn by their parents and moved to a different school because three Traveller children were enrolled in the school. At the beginning of the 2002/2003 academic year, only the Traveller children were on the school rolls, putting the very future of the school in question. This was clearly preferable to some over having their children be educated alongside Traveller children. The issue of negative attitudes towards Travellers cannot be laid entirely at the door of the mass media and can be said to reflect a form of national xenophobia.

A search of 12 months (November 2000-October 2001) of the Irish Times coverage of refugees, asylum seekers and travellers yielded a total of 264 stories where these groups were mentioned in headlines. These data are given in Table 5. The numbers in brackets refer to the number of stories in each category that focused on that category overseas rather than at home. There was a significant separation of refugees from asylum seekers in the Irish Times coverage which was lacking in other media. Most of the stories were reported as straight news stories.

Table 5. Number of Irish Times stories in various categories.

Irish Times

		Headline Focus		
	Refugees & Asylum	Refugees	Asylum Seekers	Travellers
Lead	(0) 0	(1) 1	(0) 0	(0) 2
Letters	(0) 1	(0) 4	(0) 7	(0) 7
Feature	(0) 0	(2) 3	(1) 4	(0) 3
News	(0) 3	(45) 70	(21) 64	(1) 77
Terror	(0) 0	(0) 18	(0) 0	(0) 0

It is interesting to note that stories about travellers accounted for almost 30% of the stories overall. When those stories are analysed, a definite pattern emerges, as seen in the sample below in Table 6. In the case of stories about travellers, those stories which report traveller behaviour in a negative fashion

(traveller-traveller violence, traveller encampments) seem to get greater coverage than those stories about travellers which highlight the problematic conditions under which most travellers live (lack of serviced sites, traveller mortality rates, traveller experience of bias).

Table 6 Irish Times Story Headlines and Word Counts

	Word Count
International Day Against Racism	=1133
Travellers' encounter compared to Braveheart	= 582
Travellers seek money to leave industrial estate	= 576
Travellers camp at gates of sailing club	= 486
6,000 Travellers still live on unserviced sites	= 97
German Nazis stab Refugees	= 64
Travellers live shorter lives	= 54
Anti-Traveller Bias Plan Launched	= 45

We believe that much of this media coverage ignores poverty or focuses on marginal issues, not systemic ones. Immigrants, in terms of media coverage, have become the new poor in Irish society and are covered as the "devil's poor" were in the past. In this respect, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and travellers are conflated. Both groups covered in marginal terms with coverage often very negative (pace length). We further believe that this content is reflected in public opinion.

Hard data on attitudes

Table 7 shows the actual numbers of asylum seekers in Ireland, based on information obtained from the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, Dublin. When measured against an indigenous population in excess of 3.5 million people, these figures are still relatively low. At the time of writing, the number of applications in the current year had amounted to 8,412 with some indication that the year total would come close to that recorded for 2001.

Table 7 Numbers making asylum applications in Ireland 1992-2001

Year	#		Year	#
1992	39		**1997**	3,883
1993	91		**1998**	4,626

1994	362		1999	7, 724
1995	424		2000	10,938
1996	1,179		2001	10,325
Total: **39,591**				

Table 8 is included for comparative purposes. Drawing on UNHCR estimates, it shows the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees in a number of European countries including Ireland.

Table 8 Asylum-seekers, refugees of concern to UNHCR by selected country of asylum, end-2001

Country of asylum	Refugees	Asylum- seekers	Total population of concern
Portugal	449	-	449
Luxembourg	1,201	-	1,201
Ireland	3,598	10,841	14,439
Spain	6,806	-	6,806
Italy	8,571	-	8,571
Belgium	12,265	664	12,929
Finland	12,728	-	12,728
Norway	50,128	-	50,128
Denmark	73,284	-	73,284
France	131,601	34,551	166,152
Sweden	146,491	17,600	164,091
United Kingdom	148,550	39,400	187,950
Netherlands	152,338	78,550	230,888
Germany	903,000	85,533	988,533

If we look at the EVS data on attitudes to immigrants, we can see from Table 6 one change in attitudes over time. As part of a series of questions, respondents in each of the three surveys were asked to indicate from a list those categories of people they would not want to have as neighbours. Table 9 summarises the data by age in relation to immigrants and foreign workers. The differences between 1981 and 1990 are marginal, but the differences between 1990 and 2000 are quite significant, with a rise of more than 100% in the numbers of respondents specifically selecting immigrants or foreign workers as undesirable neighbours. The most dramatic increase is seen in the case of 25 – 34 year olds (1.3% in 1981 to 8.6% in 2000). As media sociologists, we note that this change is marked by yearly rises in the number of applications for asylum, a rise in the number of work permits issued to foreign nationals and

increased media coverage, which in the case of the tabloid media has often been negative and misinformed. As we mentioned earlier, it is important to note that significant numbers of work permits have been issued to foreign nationals in Ireland. This rose from 18,000 in 2000 to 34, 335 in 2002.

Table 9 Number of respondents mentioning immigrants +foreign workers as unwanted neighbours by Age for EVS data 1981-2000

		mentioned 1981	mentioned 1990	mentioned 1999/2000
Age (Categorised)	18 to 24 years	14 4.0%	3 2.0%	14 8.9%
	25 to 34 years	3 1.3%	5 2.8%	18 8.6%
	35 to 44 years	11 6.4%	6 3.0%	24 11.3%
	45 to 64 years	21 7.6%	24 8.0%	41 14.7%
	65 years or more	17 9.3%	13 7.7%	25 16.8%
Total		66 5.4%	51 5.1%	122 12.1%

While the figure of 12.1% may be distressing to some, it is important that it be placed in context by comparing it with other 'unwanted neighbour' mentions. The summary data for all categories mentioned by respondents is given in Table 10. The level of intolerance expressed towards immigrants and foreign workers is on a par with that towards Muslims (13.6%), people of a different race (12.4%), and Jews (11.1%) but it is significantly less that the intolerance expressed towards drug addicts (65.7%), people with a criminal record (56.3%), or travellers (50.1%).

Table 10. Summary Data for Unwanted Neighbour Mentions

	N	Mean	%
criminal record	1004	.56	56.30
different race	1007	.12	12.40
left wing extremists	1008	.33	33.30
heavy drinkers	1007	.36	36.40
right wing extremists	1007	.32	32.20
large families	1007	9.42E-02	9.40
emotionaly unstable people	1006	.25	25.10
muslims	1007	.14	13.60
immigrants +foreign workers	1007	.12	12.10
people with AIDS	1006	.23	23.00
drug addicts	1006	.66	65.70
homosexuals	1008	.27	27.40
jews	1007	.11	11.10
gypsies	1007	.25	24.40
travellers/itinerants	1008	.50	50.10

In Table 11 we the see the selections made by respondents from various suggested responses as to how Ireland might react to people from less developed countries who wish to come here. The numbers advocating absolutist policies are relatively small in all age categories, with 8.3% of all respondents advocating a completely open frontier policy and 2.9% advocating total prohibition on inward migration. The remainder are relatively evenly balanced between those who are willing to allow immigration when jobs are available (46.6%) and those who wish to see strict limits on the numbers of foreigners (42.3%).

Table 11. Attitudes to Immigrants by Age (Categorised)

No Racists Here…

			people from less developed countries				
			anyone come who wants to	come when jobs available	strict limits on the number of foreigners	prohibit people coming here from other countries	Total
Age (Categorised)	18 to 24 years	Count	11	73	67	3	154
		% of Age (Categorised)	6.9%	47.8%	43.3%	1.9%	100.0%
	25 to 34 years	Count	20	90	94	1	205
		% of Age (Categorised)	9.8%	43.8%	45.7%	.6%	100.0%
	35 to 44 years	Count	13	103	83	10	209
		% of Age (Categorised)	6.1%	49.4%	39.5%	5.0%	100.0%
	45 to 64 years	Count	27	133	111	10	280
		% of Age (Categorised)	9.5%	47.5%	39.5%	3.5%	100.0%
	65 years or more	Count	12	64	67	4	147
		% of Age (Categorised)	8.3%	43.5%	45.4%	2.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	82	463	420	28	995
		% of Age (Categorised)	8.3%	46.6%	42.3%	2.9%	100.0%

Table 12 indicates that there is a slender majority, across all age groups, in favour of inward migrants maintaining their own customs and traditions rather than adopting the customs of the host country. This attitude of acceptance of another's traditions is most marked amongst the youngest age cohort (62.5% vs. 37.5%). Table 13 compares the responses seen in Tables11 and 12 in a comparison crosstabulation. The chi square statistic for this crosstabulation was non-significant indicating that there is no relationship between the two sets of attitudes. In other words, there is no reason to believe that those who are opposed to immigration are any more likely to impose indigenous customs on inward migrants than are those in favour of immigration.

Table 12. Attitudes to Immigrants' Customs by Age (Categorised)

			immigrants		
			maintain distinct customs and traditions	take over the customs of the country	Total
Age (Categorised)	18 to 24 years	Count	85	51	135
		% of Age (Categorised)	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%
	25 to 34 years	Count	106	71	177
		% of Age (Categorised)	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
	35 to 44 years	Count	101	79	180
		% of Age (Categorised)	56.3%	43.7%	100.0%
	45 to 64 years	Count	132	116	248
		% of Age (Categorised)	53.4%	46.6%	100.0%
	65 years or more	Count	72	55	127
		% of Age (Categorised)	56.6%	43.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	496	371	867
		% of Age (Categorised)	57.3%	42.7%	100.0%

Table 13. Crosstabulation of Attitudes to Immigration by Attitudes to Immigrants' Customs

		people from less developed countries				
		anyone come who wants to	come when jobs available	strict limits on the number of foreigners	prohibit people coming here from other countries	Total
immigrants	maintain distinct customs and traditions	40	244	199	10	491
	take over the customs of the country	27	161	169	12	368
Total		66	404	367	22	860

Turning to the issue of general levels of concern for others, the 1999/2000 EVS sought to discover how concerned respondents were about various categories and groups in society. Tables 14, 15 and 16, indicate the answers from the Irish data, broken down by age. These are in response to questions about concern for immediate family, human kind and immigrants respectively.

Table 14. Crosstabulation of Concern for Immediate Family by Age

			Age (Categorised)					
			18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 years or more	Total
concerned with immediate family	very much	Count	95	138	148	203	104	689
		% of Age (Categorised)	60.9%	66.7%	70.5%	71.9%	69.9%	68.5%
	much	Count	26	26	26	26	18	123
		% of Age (Categorised)	16.7%	12.8%	12.5%	9.3%	11.7%	12.2%
	to a certain extent	Count	9	11	11	17	6	53
		% of Age (Categorised)	5.6%	5.1%	5.1%	5.9%	4.2%	5.3%
	not so much	Count	13	16	12	21	11	73
		% of Age (Categorised)	8.2%	7.5%	5.6%	7.6%	7.4%	7.2%
	not at all	Count	13	16	13	15	10	68
		% of Age (Categorised)	8.5%	7.9%	6.2%	5.4%	6.8%	6.8%
Total		Count	157	207	210	282	149	1005
		% of Age (Categorised)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 15. Crosstabulation of Concern for Human Kind by Age

			Age (Categorised)					
			18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 years or more	Total
concerned with human kind	very much	Count	11	29	34	52	25	152
		% of Age (Categorised)	7.3%	14.3%	16.3%	18.9%	17.1%	15.3%
	much	Count	26	41	43	42	33	186
		% of Age (Categorised)	16.9%	19.9%	20.7%	15.3%	22.6%	18.7%
	to a certain extent	Count	80	95	75	107	53	409
		% of Age (Categorised)	51.2%	46.1%	36.0%	38.7%	36.1%	41.3%
	not so much	Count	31	29	45	58	28	191
		% of Age (Categorised)	19.9%	14.2%	21.6%	21.0%	18.9%	19.2%
	not at all	Count	7	11	11	17	8	54
		% of Age (Categorised)	4.8%	5.5%	5.4%	6.0%	5.4%	5.5%
Total		Count	157	206	207	276	146	992
		% of Age (Categorised)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 16. Crosstabulation of Concern for Immigrants by Age

			Age (Categorised)					
			18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 years or more	Total
concerned with immigrants	very much	Count	5	19	26	35	19	105
		% of Age (Categorised)	3.3%	9.4%	12.6%	12.5%	13.3%	10.6%
	much	Count	17	43	40	42	27	168
		% of Age (Categorised)	11.0%	20.8%	18.8%	15.1%	18.3%	16.9%
	to a certain extent	Count	84	94	77	117	58	429
		% of Age (Categorised)	53.5%	46.0%	36.6%	42.0%	39.5%	43.1%
	not so much	Count	44	41	50	71	35	240
		% of Age (Categorised)	27.9%	19.9%	23.9%	25.3%	23.7%	24.1%
	not at all	Count	7	8	17	14	8	53
		% of Age (Categorised)	4.3%	3.9%	8.1%	5.0%	5.2%	5.3%
Total		Count	157	205	210	279	146	996
		% of Age (Categorised)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

There is an interesting contrast across the levels of concern expressed for 'human kind' and 'immigrants' when compared to that expressed for 'immediate family.' Fully 80.7% of respondents stated that they were 'very much concerned' or 'much concerned' with immediate family, compared to 34% for human kind and 27.5% for immigrants. On the opposite end of the scale only 14% of respondents stated that they were 'not so much concerned' or 'not at all concerned' with immediate family compared to 24.7% with human kind and 29.4% with immigrants.

The following tables give the data from the Irish dataset for respondents' answers to questions about willingness to help specific categories of people, viz., sick and disabled (Table 17), elderly (Table 18), neighbours (Table 19), and immigrants (Table 20).

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Table 17. Crosstabulation of   **to Help Sick & Disabled by Age**

			Age (Categorised)					
			18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 years or more	Total
help sick and disabled	absolutely yes	Count	33	59	76	102	47	318
		% of Age (Categorised)	21.4%	28.6%	36.3%	36.6%	31.9%	31.8%
	yes	Count	91	99	98	137	72	497
		% of Age (Categorised)	58.4%	48.0%	46.6%	49.0%	49.0%	49.7%
	maybe yes/maybe no	Count	31	43	31	36	21	161
		% of Age (Categorised)	19.5%	21.0%	14.6%	12.7%	14.4%	16.1%
	no	Count	1	3	4	5	7	20
		% of Age (Categorised)	.7%	1.2%	2.0%	1.7%	4.8%	2.0%
	absolutely no	Count		3	1			4
		% of Age (Categorised)		1.3%	.5%			.4%
Total		Count	157	206	210	280	147	1000
		% of Age (Categorised)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 18. Crosstabulation of Willingness to Help Elderly by Age

			Age (Categorised)					
			18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 years or more	Total
help eldery	absolutely yes	Count	34	50	73	94	46	296
		% of Age (Categorised)	21.4%	24.2%	34.6%	33.5%	30.9%	29.5%
	yes	Count	91	110	99	140	73	513
		% of Age (Categorised)	58.1%	53.3%	47.2%	49.8%	49.5%	51.2%
	maybe yes/maybe no	Count	32	44	35	40	21	172
		% of Age (Categorised)	20.5%	21.2%	16.7%	14.3%	14.1%	17.2%
	no	Count			3	7	8	18
		% of Age (Categorised)			1.4%	2.5%	5.4%	1.8%
	absolutely no	Count		3				3
		% of Age (Categorised)		1.3%				.3%
Total		Count	157	206	210	281	148	1001
		% of Age (Categorised)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 19. Crosstabulation of Willingness to Help Neighbours by Age

			Age (Categorised)					
			18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 years or more	Total
help people neighbourhood	absolutely yes	Count	23	31	54	77	31	215
		% of Age (Categorised)	14.9%	14.9%	25.6%	27.2%	21.1%	21.5%
	yes	Count	81	107	107	143	70	508
		% of Age (Categorised)	51.8%	52.0%	50.8%	50.8%	47.9%	50.8%
	maybe yes/maybe no	Count	45	59	43	53	39	239
		% of Age (Categorised)	28.8%	28.8%	20.3%	18.9%	26.6%	23.9%
	no	Count	7	6	7	9	6	35
		% of Age (Categorised)	4.5%	3.1%	3.3%	3.0%	4.4%	3.5%
	absolutely no	Count		3				3
		% of Age (Categorised)		1.3%				.3%
Total		Count	157	206	210	282	147	1001
		% of Age (Categorised)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 20. Crosstabulation of Willingness to Help Immigrants by Age

			Age (Categorised)					
			18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 years or more	Total
help immigrants	absolutely yes	Count	5	9	22	28	13	76
		% of Age (Categorised)	3.0%	4.5%	10.4%	10.1%	8.6%	7.6%
	yes	Count	46	52	55	76	33	262
		% of Age (Categorised)	29.4%	25.3%	26.1%	27.8%	22.4%	26.4%
	maybe yes/maybe no	Count	71	114	91	130	74	481
		% of Age (Categorised)	45.1%	55.5%	43.7%	47.3%	50.6%	48.4%
	no	Count	35	24	39	40	25	164
		% of Age (Categorised)	22.5%	11.9%	18.8%	14.4%	17.1%	16.5%
	absolutely no	Count		6	2	1	2	11
		% of Age (Categorised)		2.8%	1.1%	.5%	1.3%	1.1%
Total		Count	157	206	209	275	147	993
		% of Age (Categorised)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Again there is a marked contrast across the levels of willingness to help various categories of people.

Some 81.5% of respondents stated 'absolutely yes' or 'yes' when asked about willingness to help sick

and disabled people, compared to 80.7% giving the same response for the elderly, 72.3% for

neighbours and 34% for immigrants. Likewise, only 2.4% responded 'absolutely no' or 'no' when asked about sick and disabled people, compared with 4.8% about the elderly, 3.8% about neighbours and 17.6% about immigrants. The ambivalent middle group, responding 'maybe yes/maybe no' came to 16.1% for sick and disabled, 17.2% for the elderly, 23.9% for neighbours and 48.4% for immigrants.

Conclusions

Following van Dijk (1998a; 1998b; 1990 1988), this chapter has stressed the importance of examining the relationship between the contents of mainstream media coverage and public beliefs about immigrants. Media content, we believe, plays a central role in shaping public discourse and beliefs about 'race' and ethnicity.

The realities of recent inward migration into Ireland are as follows: in order to meet labour shortages, the Irish state has actively encouraged foreign nationals to seek employment here under a permit system; the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers coming to Ireland are comparatively low and there is a high rejection rate for those seeking refugee status. We would argue that in many instances the Irish media fails to reflect these complexities and in fact much media coverage has conflated the categories of migrant worker, refugee and asylum seeker.

While a range of positions can be found to exist within media and political discourse, this chapter has noted the predominance of a recurring hegemonic discourse that constructs immigration as a 'threat' to Irish society. This discourse articulates the notion that Irish state is being or is about to be 'overwhelmed' by a 'flood' of immigrants. Such arguments were used most recently by some of those who opposed the Nice Treaty. A further dimension within this anti-immigration discourse is the 'rediscovery' of the indigenous Irish poor. Stories about need and exclusion, such as that experienced by the homeless or Travelling Community, are set against the alleged generosity shown to immigrants by the Irish state. The 'New Poor' in Ireland are refugees and asylum seekers. Hegemonic media

discourse constructs immigrants as the 'Devils' or 'Undeserving Poor'. The problematising of

immigrants (in terms of crime or welfare fraud for example) within Irish media discourse conforms to

the wider tendency of the mainstream media to demonise the most marginalized in society.

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