

“SMUGGLING ZEBRAS FOR LUNCH”: MEDIA FRAMING OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN THE IRISH PRINT MEDIA

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Abstract:

In this paper we offer a critical account of Irish print media coverage of recent immigration. Using data from the year 2002 we consider how both broadsheet and tabloid print media have sought to explain the issues surrounding asylum seekers. Our analysis suggests that five key media frames are in evidence within Irish media discourse. Asylum seekers are represented as “an economic threat”; “a threat to national and local integrity”; ‘a criminal element’; ‘a contaminant’ and as ‘illegal aliens’. This analysis of media constructions of asylum seekers is presented in the context of our interest in the media’s role in the formation of public opinion and the growing levels of racism in Irish society.

“He builds a pigsty against the house wall as he did at home, and if he is prevented from doing this, he lets the pig sleep in the room with himself. The Irishman loves his pig as the Arab his horse, with the difference that he sells it when it is fat enough to kill. Otherwise he eats and sleeps with it, his children play with it, ride upon it, roll in the dirt with it, as anyone may see a thousand times repeated in all the great towns of England.”¹

Introduction:

In this paper we examine the way in which recent inward migration in the shape of those seeking asylum is portrayed by the Irish print media.² We begin by discussing the reversal of Irish migration patterns in the last thirteen years. In examining media coverage of asylum seekers we are particularly interested in investigating the

¹ F.Engels,*The condition of the working class in England*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell. 1971.

² The newspapers referred to in the content analysis are the broadsheet *Irish Times* and *Irish News* and tabloid *Star* and *Irish Mirror*.

relationship between media discourse and measured public attitudes and beliefs.³ We outline the key theoretical and methodological approaches that inform our research. Having argued the case for taking a framing analysis approach in particular, the main body of the paper examines the five key media frames used in Irish tabloid and broadsheet media. Media framing succeeds in constructing asylum seekers (them) as a significant threat to ‘Irish society’ (us). Two additional media stories, from 2003, about asylum seekers – one concerning the alleged importation of ‘exotic’ foodstuffs and the other warning about the alleged criminality of asylum seekers in maternity hospitals – are examined in detail. We conclude by critically assessing the role of the Irish print media in explaining inward migration to the Irish public. We argue that the Irish print media, and tabloid media in particular, have done their audiences a great disservice. Most media content problematises those seeking asylum. It is also responsible for creating considerable confusion in the minds of the public in terms of the differences between labour migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Media content is found to reproduce a hegemonic discourse that marginalises and excludes immigrants.

Globalisation (and Multi-Culturalism) On Our Own Terms: An Overview of Recent Immigration

The much-celebrated Irish ‘economic miracle’ of the 1990s was due in no small way to the decision by trans-national (mainly US) capital to locate in Ireland. By the early years of the 21st century, Ireland was being feted as the most globalised society in the world. Globalisation involves not only the movement of capital, knowledge and technology, but also the movement of people. Migration is an inevitable feature of the globalisation process. There is a sense that in Irish society that we want globalisation and multiculturalism on our own terms. Inward migration into Ireland in the 1990s included returning Irish migrants, retirees (mainly from the UK), ‘programme refugees’ from the Balkans, refugees, asylum seekers and labour migrants.

In 2002 the Department of Enterprise and Employment issued 40,504 work-permits in order to allow foreign nationals to work in the Irish labour market. In 2003 this figure increased to 47,551 but fell to 34,067 in 2004⁴. Labour migrants work in a diverse range of economic sectors but are heavily represented in the services sector. As Table 1 demonstrates, a total of 63,286 people sought asylum in the Republic of Ireland between 1992 and 2004. 2002 was the year in which applications for refugee status peaked – at 11,530. In common with other European countries, and with the UK in particular, the numbers seeking asylum in the Republic of Ireland dropped by 32% in 2003 with the total figure for that year standing at 7,900. The main countries of origin for those seeking asylum are Nigeria, Romania, Moldova, Zimbabwe and the Ukraine. Immigration from Romania is characterised by the movement of the Roma ethnic minority group. Only one tenth of asylum applications are successful including those successful on appeal. In comparative terms the numbers seeking asylum in Ireland is very small. In 2002 – the year with the highest number of applications to date – the rate of application was 3.1 per 1,000 of the overall population.

³ For an elaboration see E. Devereux and M. Breen ‘No Racists Here: Public Opinion, Immigrants and the Media’ in N. Collins and T. Cradden (eds.) *Political Issues in Ireland Today* 3rd edition, Manchester: Manchester University Press pp. 168-188 (2004).

⁴ In response to a query from the authors, the Department of Enterprise and Employment advised that the sudden drop in the number of work permits issued in 2004 is as a result of EU enlargement.

Year	#	Year	#
1992	39	1998	4,626
1993	91	1999	7,724
1994	362	2000	10,938
1995	424	2001	10,325
1996	1,179	2002	11,530
1997	3,883	2003	7,900
		2004	4,265
		Total	63,286

Table 1: Numbers of asylum applications in Ireland 1992-2004 (Source: Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner).

The spectre of ‘Fortress Europe’ looms large in the Irish context and may help explain the recent drop in the numbers seeking refuge. In 2002, about 50 deportation orders were issued each month. By February 2003, according to the Department of Justice, some 8,000 deportation orders had been issued to unsuccessful asylum seekers since 1999. A total of 135 failed asylum seekers (mainly Roma gypsies) were deported – in co-operation with the UK immigration authorities in February and March 2004.

‘You’ve Been Framed’

The mass media play a significant role in setting public agendas on a variety of issues, including attitudes on a wide range of social issues. The literature dealing with the influences of media content on media consumers shows that content can influence public perceptions on various issues, as well as helping to form or sustain attitudes. Agenda setting is the name given to the process whereby the public tend to list as important those items previously indicated as important in media content. Items omitted from media content tend to be ignored by the public. Even within those topics covered, media content can be such as to forge or alter persistent views among the public, depending on the nature, volume and range of coverage. This is particularly true of political and social issues where the stance of a particular newspaper or media outlet can significantly shape content and, ultimately, the attitudes of their readers, viewers or listeners. Mass media play a central role in the formation of public opinion, are selective in the messages transmitted, and are directive in trying to shape and mould opinion⁵. Media coverage can also alter public perceptions of the central participants in the process, depending on the type of coverage⁶.

While the political economy perspective correctly suggests that there are external forces at work in terms of what enters the news, it is abundantly evident that there is much left to the choices of the individual editor or, indeed, sub-editor or journalist, as well as many influences that act from within media organizations, a process known as ‘gatekeeping’. It is important to understand what ‘gates’ apply in relation to the

⁵ P.J. Shoemaker, and S. D. Reese, *Mediating the message: Theories of influences on mass media content*. White Plains, N.Y: Longmans. (1996).

⁶ M. Brewer and M. McCombs ‘Setting the community agenda’. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 73(1): 7-16. (1996).

coverage of asylum seekers and refugees, in terms of examining what is covered, to what extent, and what is omitted from coverage.

Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock⁷ report on the effect of framing in priming values differentially, establishing the salience of the one or the other. Edelman⁸ indicates the significance of omission in frames. Norris⁹ shows how news frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases and stereotyped images to reinforce certain common ways of interpreting developments. This paper continues the theoretical analysis of framing in relation to the specific issue of refugees and asylum seekers, which has not been previously researched in an Irish context. Our approach owes much to van Dijk's¹⁰ path-breaking work on race/ethnicity and ideology which demonstrates how media discourse can impact upon public beliefs and social (in)action.

In this paper, we focus on the coverage of refugees and asylum seekers as a first step to analyzing the distinct role of the mass media in the formation of public opinion about asylum seekers in Ireland today. From the Irish data of the *European Values Study*, we know that there has been a significant shift in negativity of attitudes towards foreign nationals in Ireland¹¹. In 1980 and 1990, about 5% of respondents in the Irish cohort indicated that they would regard foreigners as 'unwanted neighbours'. That figure rose to 12% in 2000. Against a backdrop of increased inward migration, and increased use of foreign labour, Irish society has seen a major and highly visible change in its racial and ethnic mix over the last ten years. Elements of this change, often negative, have been highlighted and emphasised by certain media outlets, in a biased, highly-charged and inflammatory manner.

This current research sets out the specific frames used in the Irish print media to structure stories about refugees and asylum seekers. We develop our frames, drawing on previous extensive research on the topic, rooted in a content analysis of a sample of Irish print media over the last ten years. In addition, we develop a theoretical base for understanding the background to the coverage we have documented about refugees and asylum seekers. We contend, on the basis of the extent of coverage and homogeneity of the frames across different media outlets, that what we document is not a random event; it is, rather, a measure of social reaction of the powerful to the powerless, a demonstration of hegemonic collusion, based on deeply flawed assumptions about refugees and asylum seekers, and about the nature of Irish society, while exhibiting a certain confusion of the definition of what it means to be Irish in the 21st century.

⁷ P. M. Sniderman, R. A. Brody, and P. Tetlock, *Reasoning and choice explorations in political psychology*. Cambridge England, New York: Cambridge University Press. (1991).

⁸ M. J. Edelman, 'Contestable categories and public opinion'. *Political Communication*. 10(3): 231-242 (1993).

⁹ P. Norris, 'The restless search: Network news framing of the post-Cold-War world'. *Political Communication*. 12:357-370.

¹⁰ T. A. van Dijk, *Racism and the Press*. London: Routledge (1991) & *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. London: Sage. (1998).

¹¹ E. Devereux and M. Breen 'Setting Up Margins: Public Attitudes and Media Construction of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Ireland' *Nordic Irish Studies* Vol. 2 No. 1 Summer pp. 75-93 (2003).

The Frames

Exploratory inductive analysis of the coverage of asylum seekers and refugees in Irish print media produced five key frames, which are held to constitute these groups as 'other'. These frames were validated against coverage in English-language print media worldwide. Individually the frames represent asylum seekers and the system of asylum as inherently lacking in legitimacy; asylum seekers and refugees as a threat to the constructed homogeneity of national and local communities; as a moral and physical contaminant of the imagined Irish body¹²; as an economic threat to national prosperity and the Irish tax payer; and as a criminal element presenting a threat to the personal safety of the 'legitimate'. Three frames which act to bridge the gap between the constructed 'them' and the imagined 'us' were identified – a positive frame wherein asylum seekers and refugees are represented exclusively as contributors to and participants in 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 this section, these frames are presented and defined. Their representativeness is supported through the deductive and inductive¹³ analysis of articles from the Irish print media¹⁴ during 2000 and 2001. The reader is invited to judge their validity, through the presentation of exemplar headlines and quotations.

Frame One: The Illegitimacy of Asylum Seekers and Seeking

Ward¹⁵ notes that Ireland ratified the UN convention on Human Rights (1951) in 1956, spurred by a desire to construct itself as a full participant in international politics. In the immediate aftermath, Ireland received 517 programme refugees from Hungary. Fanning¹⁶ argues that the policy of control and confinement which was

¹² The conceptualization of Ireland as a body vulnerable to contamination is drawn from R. Meade, 'Corporate Ireland: Lacking Bodily Integrity' LINC: Cork's Lesbian Magazine, Issue 3 (2001).

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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. As the focus of the paper is the issue of refugees and asylum seeking in Ireland, all stories dealing with refugees within their home countries, in Africa for example, were excluded from the analysis. Only texts in which Ireland was the country of concern were included. 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.

¹⁵ E. Ward, 'A big show-off to show what we could do: Ireland and the Hungarian Refugee Crisis of 1956' *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 8: 131-41 (1996).

¹⁶ B. Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 90-95. (2002).

enforced and the sublimation of financial ‘burden’ to the voluntary sector, emerged in part from the conceptual inadequacies of the authorities.

Contemporary print media coverage of asylum seekers and asylum seeking, suggests that among some sections of the media, this conceptual shortfall has yet to be rectified. There exists a discourse within print media coverage which fails to acknowledge the legality of asylum seeking and represents the process itself and those who participate in it as of questionable legitimacy. Asylum seeking is represented, in essence, as a phenomenon to which Ireland has become subject, rather than an international role, which Ireland chose to adopt. This discourse is, it must be emphasised, not the invention of the media, rather it reflects the prioritisation of control and security over a rights-based approach in immigration policy¹⁷.

Fifty-nine of 188 articles framed asylum seekers and refugees in terms that challenged the legitimacy of asylum seeking and seekers. Notably, although the majority of articles are clearly about asylum seekers, either of the terms refugee or asylum seeker may be used to refer to this group. Indeed, even where the term asylum seeker is correctly employed in the body of the article, one regularly finds that the headline refers to ‘refugees’.

Articles in this category generally fail to fully acquiesce to the legal basis of the asylum system, and lack specific knowledge of the specific provisions of the Convention. In the UK, sections of the press represent asylum seeking as a storming of the nation’s borders, a bombardment of the national defences. Irish print media coverage is less hysterical, but nonetheless ‘otherness’, within this frame, implies not only difference but also threat to the existing social order.

Until recently Ireland’s constitution conferred the right to citizenship on any individual born on the island. That right was rescinded in a referendum in June 2004. The subsequent change means that the constitution now defines citizenship on an ethnic basis¹⁸. Thirteen of the 59 articles referred to above highlight the link between citizenship and childbirth. They span a period in which the right to residency of non-national parents with children born in Ireland was under attack, and eventually successfully challenged by the government in the Supreme Court on the 8th of April 2002. All but one of the articles contains unchallenged allusions to the ‘abuse’ or attempted ‘abuse’ of this entitlement by asylum seekers. One refers to asylums seekers’ attempts to challenge the ruling, without pronouncing judgement on the ruling itself. Typical headlines and quotes included the following¹⁹:

¹⁷ S. Mullally, *Manifestly Unjust. A Report on the Fairness and Sustainability of Accelerated Procedures for Asylum Determinations*. Dublin: Irish Refugee Council, pp. 22 (2001).

¹⁸ The 2004 Citizenship Referendum was held on the same day as European and Local Elections in Ireland. It is worth noting the following - the referendum was passed, with 79.17% voting in favour and 20.83 voting against. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a significant number of voters spoilt their local and European election vote whilst voting in the citizenship referendum. In addition to what is now termed the ‘Sinn Fein’ factor in working class areas, the overall increase in voter turnout on the day may be attributed to people’s intentions to vote in the referendum. See C. Harris ‘Changing Turnout Trends?’ www.tasc.ie (2005).

¹⁹ Throughout the article, headlines are presented in lowercase or capitals as they appeared in Lexis-Nexis. Direct quotations from the body of articles are italicized to distinguish them from headlines.

“BABIES LET 9,000 REFUGEES STAY” (Tabloid), 23/09/02

“I’LL END REFUGEE BABY BOOM LAW; MCDOWELL VOWS CRACKDOWN ON ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS” (Tabloid), 22/07/02

“REFUGEE TOTS MUCH MORE LIKELY TO DIE” (Tabloid), 11/05/01
“It is thought they travel here to give birth so their child can get Irish citizenship”

“REFUGEE IN BABY PLEA KICKED OUT” (Tabloid), 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” (Tabloid), 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.”

In this frame, the need to tighten our citizenship laws in order to prevent ‘abuse’ by asylum seekers goes unquestioned, even in those articles that are more sympathetic to the implications for already resident parents and children. That asylum seekers made use of the legal entitlement of parents of Irish citizens to residency (whether on the basis of pregnancies planned for this purpose or happenstance) is represented as somehow fraudulent.

Six articles highlight the issue of deportation of unsuccessful asylum seekers.

“STATE’S £9,000,000 TO KICK OUT BOGUS REFUGEES; MINISTER TO MAKE DEAL WITH NIGERIA” (Tabloid), 13/08/01.

“FREE FLIGHT HOME FOR REFUGEES” (Tabloid), 23/11/01.

“£9MILLION BOOT; O’DONOGHUE AGREES NIGERIA DEAL TO KICK OUT BOGUS REFUGEES” (Tabloid), 29/09/01

“REFUGEES’ HELP DEAL” (Tabloid), 21/07/01.

“REFUGEES HELPED TO GO BACK HOME”: (Tabloid), 09/09/01
“People want to return for a variety of reasons. They may have exhausted all means of staying”.

“10,000 REFUGEES WILL BE THROWN OUT OF IRELAND IN JANUARY” (Tabloid), 29/12/01.

The cited headlines and quotations from the body of the articles are differentiated in terms of whether they are from a tabloid or broadsheet.

Whether overtly negative or not, all of these articles normalise deportation. In more overtly negative articles unsuccessful asylum seekers are represented as bogus or fraudulent individuals who deserve to be ‘kicked or thrown out’. There is no recognition in these articles that to be an unsuccessful asylum seeker simply means that one’s case was not found to have merit under the grounds for the award of asylum in a given country. It does not mean that there was no case.

Those articles which are not ostensibly negative commonly refer to high numbers of unsuccessful asylum seekers. Only one examines the basis on which cases are determined and even then only in terms of highlighting the fact that cases made on economic grounds are rejected. Arrangements with Romania and Nigeria to return asylum seekers on a voluntarily basis are depicted in a positive light as lending dignity to the movement of people, without any reference to on-going human rights issues in those countries. There is no question that the right of non-refoulement²⁰, a right of those for whom determinations have been made and those for whom determinations have yet to be made, may be impacted upon.

Seven articles highlight the actual or attempted ‘illegal’ entry of individual asylum seekers to the country:

“IRELAND UNDER SIEGE: WAR ON REFUGEE MENACE; ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN VISA CRACKDOWN” (Tabloid), 21/02/02

“REFUGEE CARRIERS FACE FINE”(Tabloid)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”: (Tabloid)
23/08/02
“*Irish motorists are being bribed to take illegal immigrants across the border, it was revealed yesterday.*”

There is no reference to the fact that the principle of non-refoulement extends to non-rejection at the frontier; that asylum seekers may make their application for asylum either at the borders of a nation or at any point during their stay in that country; or that under Article 31 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, otherwise known as ‘the Geneva Convention, asylum seekers may enter a country without the proper documentation:

“Contracting States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees who, coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened... enter or are present in their territory without authorization, provided they present themselves without delay to the authorities and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence”

The article entitled “IRELAND UNDER SIEGE: WAR ON REFUGEE MENACE; ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN VISA CRACKDOWN”²⁰ quotes a refugee support group

²⁰ “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

criticising the government for having handed over the first stage of the asylum process to unqualified staff, in this case ferry company employees. That this staff is involved in the refoulement of unprocessed asylum seekers is not noted. The progressive criminalisation of entry without proper documentation is, with this minor exception, treated uncritically. It is notable that there is no reference to the reasons why people fleeing persecution might not travel with the proper documentation; however, if entry on this basis is fraudulent, the implication is that people entering by this means are themselves fraudulent. In this context, the prevention of entry without proper documentation by the State and its delegates is normalised, without any consideration of the implications for Ireland's fulfilment of its legal obligations under the Geneva Convention and the rights which that document imparts to asylum seekers.

A further seven articles highlight the evasion of deportation by asylum seekers. Immigrants who have overstayed their work visas are conflated with asylum seekers in one of these stories. Two of these articles open with a missing persons story, but given that the missing person is an asylum seeker, both make reference to general trends regarding the evasion of deportation. The remaining four articles relate to statistics regarding 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” (Tabloid), 17/07/02

“REFUGEES GO UNDERGROUND” (Tabloid), 29/07/02

“4,000 REFUGEES IN HIDING” (Tabloid), 01/10/01

The article “WAR ON REFUGEES; 20 IMMIGRANTS IN COURT AFTER DAWN RAIDS BY GARDAI” (Tabloid), 17/07/02) includes a quotation from a refugee support group, which notes in a critical fashion that the numbers granted either leave to remain on humanitarian grounds or refugee status in Ireland are comparatively low. In other articles, the same kind of data is clearly used to imply that the number of ‘bogus refugees’ is high. In the article “REFUGEES GO UNDERGROUND” ((Tabloid), 29/07/02) the necessity of establishing the identity of all foreign nationals in the country, noted by Gardaí, is reproduced as, in another article, is the statement from an anonymous immigration official that fingerprinting is the solution to this problem (“4,000 REFUGEES IN HIDING”, (Tabloid), 1/10/01).

The picture painted by this frame is one of hundreds to thousands of asylum seekers ‘going underground’. The articles varyingly explain their disappearance in terms of the avoidance of deportation alone, an additional determination to work illegally and, in one case, the determination to evade tax on earnings from the gains of illegal employment. Three articles make specific reference to fraud perpetrated by ‘refugees’ to secure entry into the country.

“REFUGEE FESTIVAL SCAM FOILED” (Tabloid), 6/10/01.

“ASYLUM UTD – REFUGEE SCAM NIGERIANS TELL IRISH CLUBS: ‘WE CAN GET YOU A FIGO, RONALDO OR BECKS’” (Tabloid), 29/05/01.

In the articles above it is not clear that the individuals involved ever were or intended to become asylum seekers. Certainly they did not have refugee status.

The third article “Tighter controls on would-be refugees signalled” (Broadsheet, 11/12/02) refers to government proposals to introduce tighter border controls requiring asylum seekers to apply for refugee status at their point of entry to the country. This measure is represented as part of an effort to discourage “*fraudulent asylum applications*” including those made by individuals already in the State. In coming forward, those already in the country would have to “*demonstrate why they were claiming assistance from the State*”²¹ and, the journalist understood, might be subject to reduced welfare supports as a consequence²². Although there is cognisance given here to the fears of a refugee support group that insisting on application at point of entry could result in asylum seekers being turned away without being processed, there is no acknowledgement that the Geneva Convention confers everyone with the right to seek asylum whether they are at point of entry or already resident within a country. Political instability and coups d’état necessitate such provisions.

One instance of a ‘green card marriage’ merits three articles, including:

“REFUGEE BRIDE FURY AT €8K BILL” (Tabloid), 12/02/02

The fourth article reports the introduction of a:

“REFUGEE BRIDE BAN” (Tabloid), 19/11/02

which reports on the impending introduction of a new law to be introduced preventing ‘bogus marriages’ between Irish citizens and ‘refugees’ but then goes on to explain that “*asylum-seekers who marry will only get state recognition if they can prove they have lived in the Republic for three out of five years*”. Later it is stated that all “*non-national spouses must apply to the Department for a naturalisation form*”. In fact, the real implications of this law, which has since been introduced, are for Irish citizens or non-nationals with work visas who are involved in life partnerships which do not have the legal status of marriage, including co-habiting heterosexual, lesbian and gay couples. Its significance to preventing the ‘fraudulent’ means of gaining residency is a far lesser issue.

Two articles highlight the issue of trafficking generally. Both articles, while sympathetic to the victims of trafficking, hone in on the criminality of the process and lack a critical perspective. In one article, the return of trafficked ‘refugees’ discovered in Ireland to mainland Europe is reported without question. In these articles, no reference is made to the role of Irish immigration policy in encouraging traffickers.

²¹ i.e. asylum.

²² 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.

“REFUGEE CHILDREN IN CARE TO TOP 1,500 “ (Tabloid), 18/03/02.

A further fourteen articles relate to an incident in which eight people died from suffocation as a container in which they were sealed went to Ireland instead of taking the shorter journey to the UK, which the individuals thought they were making. Again all of these articles are highly sympathetic to the victims, but only two of the lengthier articles make any connection between trafficking and the difficulty of entering countries to seek asylum by regular means. Neither suggests that the incident in Wexford had any connection to developments in Irish immigration policy.

One article, which appeared among the letters to the editor of one of the selected broadsheets on 13/11/01, specifically questions the legitimacy of asylum seekers from “*Romania, Poland and Nigeria*”. The clear implication of this article was that individuals from such countries could not possibly merit refugee status, despite the stoning to death of women in Nigeria and the documented discrimination experienced by the Roma for example. The remaining two articles refer respectively to a legal report on a challenge to the interpretation of asylum law and to the introduction of the tape recording of asylum seekers’ hearings.

Of the 188 articles, 10 make specific use of the word ‘bogus’ a term which clearly has no place in responsible 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. Tracy²³ theorises Irish identity as exclusionary, presenting the Irish in terms of an imagined homogeneity of a white, heterosexual, sedentary and Catholic population²⁴. Fanning²⁵ concurs that the process of constructing a national Irish identity has been one of the racialisation which as a hegemonic discourse facilitated the exclusion of minority groups from legitimate ‘Irishness’. Against this background, the construction of the non-national as ‘other’ and the dichotomising of an imagined ‘us’ and a constructed ‘them’, is facilitated. The exclusion of the non-national ‘other’ is given material reality and legitimacy through the fetishisation of citizenship. Through their classification as non-citizens, asylum seekers and refugees are defined as being outside of the national and local community. This, in turn, excludes asylum seekers and refugees access from access to many of the resources and opportunities available to ordinary citizens.²⁶

The exclusionary nature and the power dynamics of both legal and social citizenship are normalised to the point that they are immune to challenge in much print media

²³ M. Tracy, *Racism and immigration in Ireland: a comparative analysis*. Dublin: Department of Sociology, Trinity College. (2001),

²⁴ To which “able-bodied and male” could arguably be added.

²⁵ B. Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (2002).

²⁶ B. Fanning, “On No Man's Land: Asylum Seekers in Ireland and the Limits of Social Citizenship” Paper presented to the Irish Social Policy Annual Conference, Trinity College Dublin, 27 July 2001.

coverage, while the exclusion of many legal citizens from full social citizenship is more often painted as a function of the costs of asylum provision than as a consequence of an inequitable and exclusionary conceptualisation of the average Irish citizen.

In the print media coverage analysed, a total of 21 articles were coded as framing asylum seekers and refugees as a threat to national or local integrity. 10 of those articles focused upon racism, or racist sentiments directed towards asylum seekers or refugees. While many of these articles seek to highlight racism in order to counter it, Hartman and Husband²⁷ have noted that by defining the inter-group situation as one of conflict, news media can represent the minority group as the source of the problem. Fanning²⁸ notes that racism is viewed as ahistorical in an Irish context. Thus the arrival of non-nationals may be construed as a cause of racism. Notably, it is also the case that in order to counteract or contradict racist comments they must be repeated and so even commentary which is anti-racist in its intentions may disseminate racist stereotypes.

“CLLR SAYS REFUGEES BREED LIKE ‘RABBITS” (Tabloid), 16/04/02

“Judge fines father €2,500 for going to Mosney Refugee Centre with shotgun”
Broadsheet, 30/01/02

Following a UK trend, eleven articles focused on the numbers of asylum seekers entering or reaching the country. Significantly, nine of those articles highlighted an increase in numbers. Only one article cited decreasing numbers despite the fact that 2001 was a year in which the numbers of asylum applicants to Ireland decreased. One article focused upon the fact that numbers had not fallen:

“REFUGEE SHAMBLES; EXCLUSIVE: THREE COUNTIES SWAMPED
BY LION’S SHARE OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS” (Tabloid), 07/09/01

“More visas for refugee parents” Broadsheet, 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

Saïd²⁹ theorised the West’s construction of the ‘other’ as degenerate and uncivilised as a political tool of imperialism providing justification for conquest. Ireland has itself been subject to this process; the Irish have been racialised and demonised in British print media to justify colonialism and its consequences. In the contemporary West, the

²⁷ P. Hartmann, and C. Husband, *Racism and the Mass Media: A study in the role of the mass media in the formation of white beliefs and attitudes in Britain*. Ottawa, Great Britain: Rowman & Littlefield, (1974).

²⁸ B. Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press (2002).

²⁹ E. W. Saïd, *Orientalism: western concepts of the Orient*. London: Penguin Books (1991).

same process is being executed in relation to asylum seekers and refugees, who have been racialised and stereotyped to represent the degenerate other who, far worse than requiring the exportation of ‘civilizing influences’, are importing their difference, their otherness, their degeneracy. Ireland’s history of ‘otherness’ in the Anglo-Saxon world has not removed it from this process. Indeed, Ireland has historically had experience of this process in its racialisation of the Travelling Community and their construction as a community in need of civilising. Meade³⁰ conceptualises Ireland as a body, whose internal rumblings of anger and disaffection have been disguised by a flawless complexion. Not only dissention, but also difference is regarded as an illness, which threatens bodily integrity.

The framing of asylum seekers as threats to national and community integrity is evident in the Irish print media. The exotic otherness of the asylum seeker or refugee is regarded as newsworthy; their diseases, propensity for extremism and sexual deviancy are all cited in headlines demarking the ‘carriers’ of these physical and moral contaminants as asylum seekers and refugees. This ‘other’ represents not only a future threat to the homogeneity of the community, but also an immediate threat to its legitimate members.

A total of twenty articles framed asylum seekers and refugees as a physical or moral contaminant. Nine of these articles represented asylum seekers as a potential health threat, citing the prevalence of AIDS, TB and other diseases among these groups or highlighting calls for increased compulsory health screening:

“67% of refugees health screened” (Broadsheet), 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’” (Tabloid), 10/05/02

“Quarantine at refugee camp” (Broadsheet), 7/12/02

One article highlighted high percentages of asylum seekers with mental health problems.

In terms of the threat to the moral body, one article highlighted the receipt of visas to travel for abortions, two highlighted the ‘problem’ of begging among asylum seekers, one firmly demarked sexually deviant individuals as ‘refugees’:

“REFUGEES USE PORN IN BID TO LURE TEEN GIRLS; GARDA PROBE AFTER WORK EXPERIENCE PUPILS’ ORDEAL AT HOSTEL” (Tabloid), 4/02/02

and one article cited the membership of an asylum seeker, who was taking an unrelated case to the courts, of a cult which practised voodoo.

³⁰ R. Meade, ‘Corporate Ireland: Lacking Bodily Integrity’ LINC: Cork’s Lesbian Magazine, Issue 3. (2001).

A further five articles highlighted extremism among asylum seekers, four articles relating to reactions to the threat or reality of deportation and one relating to 'political' statements on the part of an inebriated asylum seeker/refugee.

“PRISON SUICIDE BID; CELL SOAKED IN BLOOD AS REFUGEE SLASHES ARM IN VALENTINE’S DAY HORROR” Sunday Mirror, 17/02/02

“Refugee ‘celebrated September 11th’” Broadsheet, 21/12/02

Frame Four: Asylum Seekers as a Criminal Element

The framing of asylum seekers and refugees as a threat through reference to health is augmented by their framing as a threat with reference to the physical safety of legitimate members of society, and the security of their property. Repeated studies of representations in the press of immigrant groups have found that stories about crime and conflict feature heavily in print media coverage³¹ Racist stereotypes commonly invoke “fantasies related to dirt, danger, deviance, and crime”³².

In print media coverage of alleged or proven criminal acts, there appears to be an additional laxity around the potential implications of connecting minority social groups to crime. Despite NUJ guidelines, which advise journalists to only cite an individual’s race if it is absolutely strictly relevant, sub-editors and journalists alike have drawn upon both the status and nationality of individuals as points of interest for their readership in relation to this frame.

Thirteen articles in total demark refugee/asylum-seeking status in relation to stories about crime. Eleven cite the nationality or race of the accused in headline or body of the article.

Eleven of the stories focus upon ‘refugees’ as alleged criminals:

“Nigerian refugee fined for assault” (Broadsheet), 4/10/01.

“GARDAI HUNT SUSPECT REFUGEE KNIFE KILLER; ALGERIAN WANTED FOR MURDER AND BENEFITS RIP-OFF” (Tabloid), 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’” (Tabloid), 19/08/02
“*A NIGERIAN³³ drugs baron ...*” “*The Nigerian came to Ireland penniless and seeking refugee status.*”

³¹ P. Hartmann and C. Husband, *Racism and the Mass Media: A study in the role of the mass media in the formation of white beliefs and attitudes in Britain*. Ottawa, Great Britain: Rowman & Littlefield, 1974 and J. Scanlon, “The Sikhs of Vancouver: a case study of the role of the media in ethnic relations” In: UNESCO. *Ethnicity and the media*. pp. 193-261 (1977).

³² <http://www.exchangehouse.ie/ireland.htm>

³³ The capitalization of the word ‘Nigerian’ is as it appears in the body of the article.

“REFUGEE IS CHARGED WITH STAB MURDER (Tabloid), 15/08/01
“A KOSOVAN³⁴ man ...”

“REFUGEE IS SUSPECT IN SEX ATTACK ON BOY, 4; RAPE CASE
GARDAI APPEAL FOR WITNESSES “ (Tabloid), 3/09/02
“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 cite refugees/asylum seekers as victims of crime. In one cases, however, the alleged perpetrators are identified as non-nationals, while in the other the complicity of non-nationals is apparent.

Frame Five: Asylum Seekers as an Economic Threat

Articles coded under this frame accept unquestioningly the right of the Irish citizenry to privileged access to resources. The incongruence of this perspective with complaints about funding an asylum system, which we volunteered to participate in, or with the self-congratulation in which we engage regarding the size of our overseas Aid budget or contributions to charity per capita, is not recognised.

Articles which frame asylum seekers/refugees as an economic threat are dominated by references to the cost of providing asylum. Seven articles highlight this issue:

“@1M³⁵ A WEEK HOTEL BILL FOR REFUGEES; SHOCK COST OF
HOUSING ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN B&BS” (Tabloid), 20/09/02.

“BERTIE’S GIFT GRUB TO REFUGEES; EXCLUSIVE 35,000 ASYLUM-
SEEKERS GET VIP MENU“ (Tabloid), 16/01/02.

A further four articles highlight the impact of asylum on the health system:

“MICHEAL: REFUGEES BEHIND BEDS CRISIS” (Tabloid), 16/10/01.

“MATERNITY HOSPITAL HIT BY REFUGEE BABY BOOM; TOP DOC
PREDICTS ‘DOOMSDAY’ CRISIS“ (Tabloid), 6/08/01.

Three articles highlight either Social Welfare fraud on the part of asylum seekers/refugees or an argument that state benefits to these groups are overgenerous:

“FREE CARS FOR REFUGEES; CASH GRANTS BUY BMWs” (Tabloid),
16/09/02.

“REFUGEE CHEATS COST STATE EUR16M; WELFARE SCAMS ARE
‘RIFE’“ (Tabloid), 01/04/01.

³⁴ The capitalization of the word ‘Kosovan’ is as it appears in the body of the article.

³⁵ M = Million.

Other Frames: Human Interest, Positive and Supportive Coverage

Aside from the five key frames, three additional frames were identified – a human interest frame, a positive frame and a support frame.

A total of 18 stories were categorised as congruent with the human-interest frame. These stories are significant in that they represent asylum seekers and refugees as human beings, providing a counterweight to their much more frequent presentation as part of or representative of an amorphous mass. However, herein too lies the disadvantage of human-interest stories: their sympathetic focus on an individual or family may not be sufficient to counter stereotypes of a group. The individual may, just as easily, be perceived as ‘the exception’. As in media coverage of Third World issues, there is also a tendency in these stories to frame the real ‘heroes’ of these stories as the white Irish middle-class who have helped out in some way³⁶.

Of the eighteen human-interest stories, nine focused on 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” (Tabloid), 28/06/01

“Minister rejects family’s refugee case plea.” Broadsheet, 13/11/02

The remaining stories focus on stories including family separation and reunification.

Forty articles were found to be congruent with the support frame. This frame is dominated by articles, which highlight overt anti-racist arguments, articles, which focus on the Irish immigration system as overly restrictive, and articles, which highlight a link between Irish immigration policy and trafficking. Deprivation experienced by asylum seekers under Ireland’s system of direct provision is also a prominent focus. Notably 32 of these articles are based on statements by NGOs, religious groups or political figures and unlike the five key frames a significant percentage of the articles (one third) are presented as non-news (opinions, features, comments, letters to the editor etc.)

Only three articles present asylum seekers or refugees in a solely positive light, with no reference to conflict or controversy. One relates to the inclusion of refugees in a State sponsored IT ‘up-skilling’ programme, one relates to the success of two young asylum seekers in integrating into their local community and the third refers to a group of asylum seekers who have volunteered to tidy their host town to express their gratitude for the reception they have received.:

“O’MALIA BOYS A HURLING HIT; REFUGEES TAKING UP THE SLIOTAR³⁷ REFUGEES TIDY TOWN” (Tabloid), 7/06/02.

Robbers and Zebras

³⁶ For an elaboration see E. Devereux *Devils and Angels: Television, Ideology and the Coverage of Poverty*. Luton: John Libbey Media. (1998).

³⁷ The traditional ball made of leather that is used in the game of hurling.

Two newspapers published stories in 2003 that are worthy of closer attention in terms of the operation of specific media frames. The first story concerned the alleged criminality of immigrants; the second constructed immigrants as a source of contamination.

In September a tabloid Sunday newspaper warned its readership (us) about bringing gifts to new mothers (us) in a Dublin maternity hospital. ““Don’t bring gifts for new mothers”“ ran the headline and its corresponding strap stated “Stark warning to hospital visitors after thefts blamed on refugees” (them). Immigrants are termed “light-fingered.” They are accused of being engaged in “petty theft” and of “helping themselves to other patients’ goods.” Those to blame are also referred to as “coloured people”, “non-nationals” and “asylum seekers”. The article in question uses these terms interchangeably and unproblematically to refer to immigrants. The hospital in question is said to be based in “Little Africa” in Dublin city owing to the number of “...refugees from Africa (*sic*) and other West African countries.” An asylum seeker from Nigeria is specifically mentioned as being a person who has stolen a gift belonging to another mother and child. Thefts at the hospital are said to have reached “crazy proportions.” In addition, concerns are raised in the article about the lack of resources in the maternity hospital sector (for which immigrants are blamed) and the fact that security has increased in the hospital owing to immigrants “abusing the visiting rules.” Immigrant families are accused of “using the hospital like some sort of day-care centre.”

In spite of the article’s headline that would seem to suggest that a formal warning had been issued, we learn from the body of the text that the hospital authorities denied that any such warning had been given. The master of the hospital also made it quite clear - that there was not a spate of thefts in the maternity units. The sources used to counter the official denial were one expectant mother, one nurse and one hospital worker. All were unnamed.

In May the main story of another tabloid newspaper (an Irish edition of a British newspaper) contained a headline which read “Fish and Chimps; Refugees Smuggle Zebra, Monkey and Seahorse into Ireland...for Lunch.” The article drew upon a mixture of frames to tell its readership about the ‘exotic’ eating habits of immigrants. The article “revealed” that “more than two tonnes” of meats were being “seized” at Dublin airport on a monthly basis. The “Other” in this article are “Foreign people living in Ireland”; “African Passengers”; “Nigerians” and “Chinese.” We can see a deviancy/pathology frame at work in the construction of foreigners as exotic. Readers are told that “Clans are bringing the exotic meats over to their families here...”; Giant rats from Ghana and antelope meat from Africa are served at parties...”; “A Green Monkey from Nigeria ...for a “family dinner”“; Immigrants are said to be importing “monkey, zebra, seahorse and rat meat.” The criminality frame is in evidence in the following - “African passengers are smuggling”; they are involved in the “illegal importation” of “illegal meat”. Readers are warned that such “illegal importations could spread disease.” They pose a threat to endangered species and have a “strong risk of passing diseases.”

In this latter story, no indication is given that many individual nations control the import of meat and vegetable products. In the US, for example, Irish travellers may no longer bring in pork sausages or bacon rashers, long a staple commodity

accompanying many Irish visitors to their US based compatriots. Likewise, no mention is made of the availability of previously exotic meats in Irish supermarkets, such as ostrich, kangaroo, and crocodile. The authors telephoned the Food Safety Authority which was cited as a source in this story, only to be told that the meats, about which it was concerned, were in fact placed voluntarily by arriving passengers into special bins provided at customs halls for that purpose. Such voluntary cooperation with the law of the land hardly represents “seizure”.

Conclusion

This paper documents the biased, ignorant and racist tone of much of the Irish print media discourse on a new social phenomenon. It raises important questions about journalist and editorial practices not only in terms of the dissemination of racist discourse but also in terms of identity politics. The Irish print media are shown to play a significant role in the process of ‘othering’ inward migrants. It is worth noting that incoming asylum seekers do not create racism of themselves but rather encounter it as an all too manifest reality in Irish society. Beyond the obvious, the research described above raises one critical social question. Why is it so? Why is it that media content is so negative toward those in such need? The sentiments expressed in the opening quotation from Engels are abhorrent to most Irish people, representing as they do typical anti-Irish attitudes in 19th century England. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that there appears to be a collective amnesia about the experience of Irish emigrants to England, the US and further afield, who often experienced racism at various levels. That racism, once experienced by the Irish abroad, is now the experience of those who come here seeking asylum. This phenomenon is worthy of further analysis with particular reference to how mass media succeed in generating fear and how they engage in public exercises in ‘othering’.

It is our contention that dominant negative discourses regarding asylum seekers act to perpetuate and advance the social distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Moreover, we view this ‘othering’ process as rooted in the devices of stereotyping and scapegoating. These feed a sense of common threat, which in its creation of a sense of both tantalising danger and comforting unity is perceived as highly saleable. We argue that such constructions embody many key news values, producing profitable negativity. Moreover, the highly excluded and powerless position of the subjects facilitate the lazy journalism of stereotypes and myths.