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Foreword: “Irish history is not a closed shop”: A multidisciplinary approach to Ireland’s discourses of otherness

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The impetus for this special themed edition of the *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies* is a funded research project, in operation from 2012 to 2015, with the title “The Construction of Otherness in the Public Domain: A Critical Study of the Case of Ireland” (FFI2011-25453). Given the latter’s empirical and theoretical focus, this collection of papers was originally designed to examine the old and new discourses of Otherness generated in a changing Irish society, whereby those considered different, and potentially dangerous or threatening, might have experienced both social and discursive marginalisation. Its main aim was then to cover the complexities of a challenging period and a challenging topic from an interdisciplinary perspective.

As is well known, from 1990s onwards there have occurred some significant changes across all of Europe, and Ireland is no exception. The Celtic Tiger started to roar, literally and metaphorically speaking, in 1994 (McWilliams, 2006); it was then that the British economist Kevin Gardiner used this expression with the intention of comparing the Republic’s impressive, as well as unexpected, economic growth with examples of a similar nature present years before in Asia (Murphy 2000).

The boom encouraged alternate notions of Irishness that resulted from the country’s newly-found heterogeneity largely derived from the growing migrant intake. This would lead to the coexistence of white Catholic Irish people with people of other ethnicities and religious backgrounds in a now multicultural society whose rather rigid political landscape had to learn how to give space to parties other than mainstream Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour.

Even though to date these changes have encouraged the improvement of the condition of some minorities (at least on paper), it is definitely true that, in this context, countless images of the less privileged groups are recurrently reproduced in a rather unfavourable light. Very often, these can be associated with evil, illness, ignorance, delinquency or crisis, and for that reason they are likely to be demonised; unsurprisingly, it is from fear that this view frequently seems to stem (Bartley & Hidalgo-Tenorio 2015; 2016).

In the so-called continental philosophy (Althusser 1969/1971; Lacan 1977), the concept of “Otherness” appears in order to specify what is understood as different from oneself, so that the Other can end up being rejected, avoided, animalised and reified. Those who are Otherised can both become society’s scapegoats, and simultaneously the objects of pity and compassion. Social scientists try to explain the mechanisms through which

societies, communities and groups exclude other societies, other communities and other groups in a way that, finally, they subdue, stigmatise and marginalise them. The fields of postcolonial studies (Bhaba 1995; Fanon 1990; Said 1995) and feminist studies (Cameron, 1990), for example, have delved into this subject matter for more than three decades now.

Despite low levels of support given to extreme right parties, racism, xenophobia and homophobia are a problem in Ireland, which is evidenced in the physical and symbolic attacks on ethnic minorities reported in the last years. For instance, in 2008, 183 people were arrested and charged, whilst there were more victims who opted to remain silent.ⁱ Another proof of Otherisation is the use of intimidation, threats and verbal abuse, often suffered by Africans or Eastern Europeans; the beatings received by members of the Asian community; the introduction of medical centres for travellers only;ⁱⁱ or the harassment suffered by young gays and lesbians in some Dublin schools.ⁱⁱⁱ The graffiti displayed in order to encourage foreigners to be thrown out of the country is a mere anecdote by comparison with the killing of 15-year-old Nigerian teenager Toyosi Shittabey in Tyrrelstown.^{iv}

Bearing the above in mind, at first, this themed issue aimed to scrutinise the construal and self-construal of some particular communities which could have felt exclusion from society. Subsequently, on account of the number of proposals submitted for review once a call for papers was internationally issued, the scope, object of research as well as methodology and theoretical approach widened to a degree from the original ones. In some way or another, however, all the contributions share a similar goal in that they seek to comprehend Ireland's intricacies through the analysis of the representation of some new social realities along with others which, being old and known, have been constructed by hegemonic voices in order to suit the convenience of the ruling powers.

Women, migrants, travellers, and gays and lesbians form the main thematic core of this issue. As marginal individuals par excellence, they have all been mistreated throughout history in most corners of the world. In the present case, it is possible to observe the neglect they have undergone, for instance, (1) when they are forced to leave the country in search of better opportunities, (2) when the system subjects them to various social and moral constraints in the civil society, or (3) even in the way the media tend to portray them. In the last decades, contemporary Ireland has tried to cope in various ways with the stigmas of difference, poverty and vulnerability, to name but a few. The seven articles selected are outstanding exemplars of this trend and demonstrate how powerful institutionalised knowledges can still be.

The title of the article by Leanne Bartley and Miguel Ángel Benítez-Castro is self-explanatory: "Evaluation and Attitude towards Homosexuality in the Irish Context: A Corpus-assisted Discourse Analysis of APPRAISAL Patterns in 2008 Newspaper Articles". The central focus of this paper is the examination of the linguistic strategies employed in the Irish press; in particular, the authors aim to study the expression of emotions as conveyed in the news items selected, the textual features showing the writers' assessment of the value of things in the world, and the most distinctive tactics by means of which these can sanction people's good or bad behaviour (White, 2006). Their data support the hypothesis that stereotypical representations of homosexuality

pervade Ireland's newspapers, which leads to male and female gays being connected with anomaly, violence, unethical conduct and immoral life style. The corpus compiled by Bartley and Benítez-Castro proves that escaping society's conventions and limitations is still a major issue for homosexuals in Ireland.

In Zeynep Koca-Helvaci's contribution ("Social Misfits or Victims of Exclusion? Contradictory Representations of Irish Travellers in the Irish Press"), attention is paid to the media portrayal of another disadvantaged group: Irish Travellers. Again, the majority's normality is defined in opposition to a minority's assumed inappropriateness. By and large, nomadism is depicted as incompatible with modern industrial civilisation. Furthermore, if accompanied by a lack of economic means, it is considered to be equal to criminal activity. By combining the analysis of journalists' legitimation strategies (van Leeuwen, 2007) with the Systemic-Functional APPRAISAL framework of categorising evaluative language (Martin and White, 2005; Bednarek, 2006), Koca-Helvaci is able to show how the differing ideological position of the newspapers under analysis is clearly revealed through the discursive patterns employed, sometimes linked to stereotype-based perceptions about this out-group.

Jill Vaughan's paper ("Landscapes of the Irish Language: Discursive Constructions of Authenticity in the Irish Diaspora") revolves around the role played by the Irish language in three Irish immigrant communities in the US, Canada and Australia. Having been subject to oblivion or almost made disappear for centuries by the enactment of very restrictive Penal Laws (Crowley, 2000), the foundation of the Republic of Ireland could not be understood without the survival, or revival (Hyde, 1904), of the Gaelic (Irish) language both as an emblem of past Celtic traditions and as cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1989) for the future generations. The qualitative ethnographic approach used in this contribution concentrates on the analysis of a corpus of interviews to learners and speakers of Irish, as well as the observation of various cultural activities organised in each diaspora site, and the linguistic practices generated in such an environment. Thus, the author can draw very interesting conclusions on how the people interviewed for this investigation construe the discourses of identity and authenticity, based on factors such as ethnicity, historicity, systemic coherence, value, consensus and authority. The contrast between "plastic Paddies" and "legitimate language users" resides in the degree of commodification of Irish-related things that seems to be encouraged by the strong feeling of nostalgia prompted by the distance from the country their ancestors left some time ago.

In "Female Voices in the Context of Irish Emigration: A Linguistic Analysis of Gender Differences in Private Correspondence", Carolina Amador-Moreno deals with the epistolary genre in the context of, mainly, nineteenth-century migration from Ireland. As another outstanding example of corpus-driven research in this themed issue, this contribution explores the extent to which men's and women's authorship may be detected through the analysis of the linguistic patterns examined in the letters written by the members of two Irish families who settled in Argentina from 1840 to 1920. Due to the nature of this type of texts, scholars can address various aspects ranging from history to sociology and linguistics. Within the latter, some advances have been made on how gendered discourse (Ray, 2009), social relationships (Barton and Hall, 1999) or language change (Auer et al., 2015) can be explained through the study of letter writing. In the comparison made by Amador-Moreno, it is worthy of note that there exist some

specific gender-based linguistic differences reflecting, especially, the female addresser's closeness, spontaneity and solidarity with her addressee.

The paper by Jason King, entitled "Three Kings: Migrant Masculinities in Irish Social Practice, Theoretical Perspective and Theatre Performance", is more than a sociological exploration of migration and masculinity. This paper firstly reports on the theorisation of the hegemonic discourse of a socially-defined and biologically-created construct conventionally used to legitimise men's dominant position in society (Connell, 1995), to later consider Irish male migrants' actualisation of this excessive pressure to be successful and autonomous, masked by sexuality, aggression and an apparent lack of emotions. In the subsequent sections, the author discusses some of the prejudiced views on these marginalised Others as reproduced in Ireland's media and other discursive practices, theatre and movies included. King claims that, despite the obvious linguistic and background differences of the characters on the stage and on the screen, the Irish emigrants in London performed by English-speaking or Irish-speaking actors in Murphy's play and Collins's filmic adaptation, respectively, and the West-African immigrants in Dublin created by Arambe, face the same difficulties in being socially accepted, while they construe contradictory conceptions of masculinity that necessarily clash with each other.

"Listening to Identity: Music in 21st century Ireland" by Andrew Blake questions the struggle over Irishness (either the official one or other alternative conceptualisations resulting from globalisation) as revealed in the popular culture of the new century. Without a doubt, the Irish nation as one single unified entity is at stake in the era of multiculturalism (Onyejelem, 2005), a fact of which Blake tries to make the reader aware in this paper. Traditional music has often been sold as one of the many symbols of an allegedly common cultural code reinforced by ethnically and religiously pure canonical nationality. At present, however, this essentialist thinking and authoritarian ideology are not tenable any longer for various reasons. This is one of the conclusions the author reaches after reviewing the literature in the area and analysing the music used in such a pervasive medium as television advertising.

Last but not least, Kate Power's paper deals with a topical issue of great interest. In "Church Trailblazer Rev Pat Storey on Weight Watchers, Caffeine and how she Named her Dog after Former New York Mayor": News Representations of the first Female Anglican Bishop in the UK and Ireland", the author analyses the interplay between gender, language, religion and authority in the Anglican Church, which in the last few years has witnessed the consecration of their first female bishop. For such a purpose, Power collects a corpus of newspaper articles about Bishop Storey, along with local parish publications and newsletters, and proceeds to its careful examination by combining Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (2001) and Martin's Positive Discourse Analysis (2004). Thus, the textual and contextual levels of analysis are brought together in an attempt to discuss texts that do motivate social change. The media representation of such an influential female in a male-centred institution proves that gender stereotyping as a way of construing evaluative and attitudinal meanings can be superseded by the real portrayal of a real woman in power.

As guest editor, I am very grateful to have been provided with the opportunity to develop this special themed issue of the *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*. The initial project indeed became a reality thanks to all of the authors who contributed their outstanding work to this edition, and to each of the anonymous peer reviewers who gave their time and expertise so generously. Certainly, without Kevin Lalor's and Sinead Freeman's support it would never look as it does now. Thank you very much for having shared this long journey with me as well.

Notes

- ⁱ See *Irish Examiner*, "Racism in Ireland – Abuse is an affront to our history", 24 September 2009, <http://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/editorial/racism-in-ireland--abuse-is-an-affront-to-our-history-101659.html>".
- ⁱⁱ See "Racism in Ireland. Travellers fighting back", <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/rbr/travrbr2.html>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Kiran Sarma (2004), "A review of research on victimisation of the gay and lesbian community in Ireland", *Garda Research Report*, No. 4/04, http://www.garda.ie/Documents/User/Gru_Report_Gaylesbian%5B1%5D.pdf.
- ^{iv} See John Spain, "Ireland of the welcomes... and the racism", 14 April 2010, http://www.irishcentral.com/story/roots/ireland_calling/ireland-of-the-welcomes-and-the-racism-90834164.html.

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