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Mayday, Mayday! Newspaper framing anti-globalizers!

A critical analysis of the *Irish Independent's* anticipatory coverage of the 'Day of the Welcomes' demonstrations

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a critical analysis of the discourses employed in the *Irish Independent's* anticipatory coverage of the 'Day of the Welcomes' demonstrations that occurred in Dublin during 2004. These demonstrations were organized by a broad church of 'anti-globalization' activists who sought to use the coincidence of EU enlargement and the May Day holiday as an opportunity to highlight alternative visions of the European project. As Ireland's biggest selling 'quality' newspaper, the *Irish Independent* has had a significant role in framing public debates about key social and political questions in this state. I show how, in the run up to the 'Day of the Welcomes', the *Irish Independent's* coverage discredited both the political aspirations and the potential conduct of protesters. The overwhelming thrust of this coverage was to sanction dominant ideologies in relation to neo-liberalism, EU expansionism and the place of dissent in Irish society.

KEY WORDS ■ anticipatory coverage ■ anti-globalization ■ discourses
■ EU enlargement ■ framing ■ ideologies ■ neo-liberalism

This article is primarily concerned with media coverage of protest. In particular, it interrogates the print media's role in the transmission of ideologically charged representations of social movement activism. Critical media theorists have long recognized that newspapers exceed 'professional' standards of objectivity and impede the free exchange of ideas by moving into the realm of comment or opinion, by framing arguments and actors in discriminatory ways, or by disregarding worthy contributions to public debate (Couldry, 1999; Eldridge, 1995; Fairclough, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Halloran et al., 1970; Louw, 2001; Philo

et al., 1995). For the majority of news consumers mainstream outlets continue to be the first point of contact – perhaps sole point of contact – for accounts of protest activity. Perhaps, as Crossley (2002: 138) suggests, ‘only some movements, some of the time’ are disadvantaged by such coverage and ostensibly negative publicity may actually raise a movement’s profile, thus rallying new supporters. Alternatively, hostile, trivializing or partial coverage may reduce protesters’ credibility in the eyes of non-participants, particularly when media fixate upon the character of participants rather than on the substance of their arguments (Couldry, 1999; Gitlin, 1980; Halloran et al., 1970; Ketchum, 2004; Philo et al., 1995; Watkins, 2001).

This article offers a critical commentary on the discursive construction of protest that occurred in the pages of the *Irish Independent* during April 2004. I analyse the *Irish Independent*’s anticipatory coverage of the ‘Day of the Welcomes’ demonstrations in order to highlight how the newspaper became a partisan participant in this debate about Europe. Its partiality was expressed through straightforward reportage, evocative headlines and a distinctive lexicon that simultaneously demonized the *potential* conduct of ‘anti-globalization’ activists and fetishized a law and order agenda. However, because the *Irish Independent*’s discourses explicitly endorsed a neo-liberal construction of economic development, EU expansionism and the social role of culture, they also, by implication, negatively framed the discourses of ‘anti’ or ‘critical’ globalism. Historically, the *Irish Independent* has shown a strong hostility to socialist or left-wing opinion (O’Donnell, 1945). This article shows that in the lead-up to the ‘Day of the Welcomes’ the ideological thrust of the newspaper’s coverage justified its continued reputation as a mouthpiece of establishment discourses.

Background

In January 2004 Ireland assumed the presidency of the European Union for a six-month term of office that coincided with the accession of 10 new member states. At the flag raising ceremony to initiate the presidency, Taoiseach¹ Bertie Ahern promised that EU enlargement would be marked on 1 May by ‘a major event to welcome our old friends and new partners’ (Ahern, 2004a). Addressing the European Parliament on 14 January, Ahern dedicated his tenure to the principles of partnership and consensus: ‘[W]e have chosen Europeans Working Together as the theme of our Presidency’ (2004b). Again he hailed the forthcoming accession of new states and, framing it as a cultural rather than political occasion, emphasized its festive character: ‘We plan to make this a real community welcome in Ireland. Community cultural events are being organised and real local involvement and international exchange

will occur' (Ahern, 2004b). This celebratory intent was underlined with accession day's renaming as 'The 'Day of the Welcomes''. The EU summit in Dublin would be complemented by a selection of performances and creative processes taking place in the capital and 10 regional centres.² Partnering each regional centre with an accession state, the Irish government hoped that a broad cross-section of the public would engage with, and would consequently validate, the processes of EU enlargement. Because, Shore (2000) argues, political and economic negotiations typically occur beyond direct popular control, EU elites must discursively construct and market a positive image of a People's Europe. 'Culture' is the primary vehicle through which this image is transmitted and shared symbols such as the EU flag, Beethoven's anthemic 9th, or the 'Day of the Welcomes', express and solidify a pan-European identity.

The fragility of this identity was revealed when social movements in Ireland, and internationally, reconstructed the 'Day of the Welcomes' as an opportune time for high-profile protest. To coincide with the celebrations and the accompanying summit, activists affiliated to the Dublin Grassroots Network (DGN) called a 'European Day of Action' and scheduled a weekend-long menu of demonstrations (30 April – 3 May). In seeking to mobilize participation in the protests, DGN reclaimed accession day as a political occasion and as an opportunity for the Irish public to confront the contradictions of EU expansionism. Condemning immigration controls and the emergence of Fortress Europe, DGN asserted that:

increasingly the EU is an excuse for privatisation, for shifting the burden of taxation onto you and for Ireland's increasing involvement in military adventures. We are struggling with others across Europe for a different type of Europe . . . (DGN, 2004)

An alternative statement and call to action was issued by 'Another Europe is Possible' (AEIP), a 'broad-based alliance' bringing 'groups and individuals together from all over the Island of Ireland to organise events during the EU presidency'.³ Affiliates included left-wing parties such as the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party and Sinn Fein, and individual MEPs and community activists. AEIP invited protesters to voice their opposition to EU policy at the 'May Day march against war and corporate greed' and by celebrating multiculturalism at an alternative carnival.

Aside from organizing competing events simultaneously, Government and protesters discursively framed the 'Day of the Welcomes' in contrasting ways and thus entered a contest over the meaning, relevance and justice of the European project. The rival events also signified a more fundamental disagreement about the impact of globalization on Ireland and beyond. As opposing sides sought to mobilize citizens to endorse their arguments, they might have

hoped that Irish newspapers would provide neutral and broadly inclusive platforms for the conduct of this debate. However, as the *Irish Independent* framed the controversy for its readers, its coverage uncritically defended the European project, presented protest as little more than a security problem, demeaned anarchist and foreign protesters and reduced 'culture' to the lowly status of money-spinner. Ultimately, the newspaper sought legitimacy from and further legitimized dominant political ideologies and it invoked stereotypical frames through which the actions and aspirations of protesters might be appraised by its readership (Halloran et al., 1970).

Conservative traditions of the *Irish Independent*

From its launch by William Martin Murphy in 1905 the *Irish Independent*, with its conscious appeal to the sensibilities of the Catholic middle classes and prosperous farmers, mimicked the conservatism of the *Daily Mail* (Oram, 1983). Insinuating itself as the 'favourite daily of the Catholic clergy' (O'Donnell, 1945: 388) the newspaper self-censored the publication of racy or sexually suggestive stories. Through its articulation of business interests, preoccupation with a law and order agenda, close association with the bourgeois politics of Fine Gael, condemnation of trade unionists (notoriously during the 1913 Lockout), the 1916 Rising, and the Spanish Republic, it quickly established itself as an influential mouthpiece of reactionary opinion in Ireland (Horgan, 2001; O'Donnell, 1945; O'Driscóil, 2001). Nowadays the *Irish Independent* maintains its conservative reputation despite some liberalization of its editorial line on social issues, its move towards a lifestyle focus and its more indeterminate political allegiance (Horgan, 2001). During the 1980s it predominantly situated its coverage of the 'Northern Troubles' within a simplistic 'men of violence' frame (Kelly, 1986: 420). More recently, Pollak (1999) criticised its unsympathetic and inflammatory construction of refugee-related issues, and in 1997 it controversially welcomed a Fianna Fail/Progressive Democratic election victory based on the coalition's commitment to neo-liberal economic and taxation policies (Horgan, 2001).

From an initial print run of 50,000 copies, the *Irish Independent's* sales grew impressively (Oram, 1983) and by the outbreak of the Second World War its net daily circulation was in the region of 150,000 (O'Donnell, 1945: 391). More recent figures demonstrate that the *Irish Independent* remains the number one choice for weekday news consumers. The newspaper, now available in both broadsheet and tabloid editions, had a combined net (daily) circulation of 181,080 at the close of June 2004. This was significantly greater than that of its nearest Irish-owned broadsheet competitor, the *Irish Times* – net circulation

116,009 for the same period (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2005: 4). The *Irish Independent's* market domination is bolstered by its affiliation to an international media power, Independent News Media (INM). INM's chief executive is (sir) A. J. O'Reilly, the former CEO of Heinz who was, in 2004, Chair of Eircom, the incumbent telecommunications operator in Ireland. INM has a global corporate presence as market-leading newspaper publisher in New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa, and market-leader regional publisher in Australia and India.⁴

Since INM also has controlling interests in the *Star*, *Sunday Independent*, *Evening Herald*, *Sunday World*, a range of local and regional newspapers, and significant shareholdings in the *Sunday Tribune* (Tovey and Share, 2003: 431), its claim to be 'Ireland's largest media company'⁵ is compelling. Its increasingly monopolistic status within the trade generates ongoing concern, with commentators fearing for diversity of ownership and inclusivity of opinion (Horgan, 2001; Rapple, 1997). Suspicions that the Irish newspaper industry may not nurture discursive pluralism are underscored when we consider the general character of newspaper values and journalism. Corcoran's (2004) research indicates that although Irish daily papers are rarely overtly party political, centre-right politics dominate with only the *Irish Times* classifiable as a 'liberal' organ. Corcoran's study also demonstrates that journalists themselves are aware that minority or dissident discourses are poorly served in the pages of their newspapers. In this context, 'anti-globalization' or dissident activists face a dual challenge; firstly to negotiate access for alternative discourses into what is a narrowly circumscribed sphere of debate; and secondly to create their own media outlets and thus contest INM's overall dominance of the newspaper field.

Theoretical influences and their application

Critical media scholars recognize that there is never a single or uniform public discourse on any political or social issue (Couldry, 1999; Eldridge, 1995; Fairclough, 1989, 1999; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Ketchum, 2004; Philo et al., 1995; Van Dijk, 1993, 1998). Instead, researchers should think in terms of *multiple discourses* that can inflect, oppose, complement and undermine each other as they do battle for public approval. An 'issue culture' that is characterized by contestation and controversy is thus created, and within that culture individual discourses differ in their capacity to secure a broadly accepted or dominant status. Established patterns of power or privilege, related to factors such as class, gender, ethnicity or authority, mediate access to and influence over public opinion. Inequality is therefore self-perpetuating, although not always crudely or mechanically, because the 'unique access' of elites to public

discourse guarantees superior and more numerous opportunities for participation in the 'discursive management of the public mind' (Van Dijk, 1993: 290).

In Ireland the 'Day of the Welcomes' represented an opportunity for various interest groups, including critics of capitalist globalization, to discursively frame the processes of EU integration. In this article I analyse how the *Irish Independent* mediated those conflicting discourses, by evaluating its representation of official and activist perspectives on the May Day events. This qualitative study draws on 22 articles published in April 2004 – the month preceding the 'Day of the Welcomes' – that carried information and predictions regarding the prospective character of the 'celebration/protest'. Those articles therefore constitute the *Irish Independent's* 'anticipatory narrative' (Watkins, 2001). In highlighting the thrust and tone of that narrative, I suggest that although the newspaper might not have decisively determined readers' expectations of the protests or their attitudes towards the politics of 'anti-globalization', it restricted the parameters within which those opinions and attitudes were formulated.

This article is based on a comparatively small corpus of data. Sacrificing breadth for depth of analysis may reduce the appeal of this study for readers interested in a more general review of the politics of media representation in Ireland. Nonetheless, a limited yet systematic analysis such as is practised here may facilitate a more nuanced understanding of an individual newspaper's ideological functioning. Watkins' (2001) research into US coverage of the 'Million Man March' reveals how the mainstream media's anticipatory narrative hyped up the impending demonstration yet also depoliticized it by fixating on the idiosyncrasies of leading activist Louis Farrakhan. Enraptured by an allegedly deviant personality, media coverage simultaneously disregarded and discredited the diversity of anti-racist discourses expressed by the broad mass of African-American participants. Louw (2001: 159–60) argues that when news media 'set' the agenda of public debate, 'discursive dominance has as much (and possibly more) to do with what information is left out, as what is disseminated' (see also Eldridge, 1995; Halloran et al., 1970). For Fairclough (1989) ideology is most pernicious when it masquerades as common sense. Media texts rarely 'spout ideology' coarsely or consciously; instead they offer cues through which particular interpretations of the social world are naturalized and rationalized. Among those media cues are lexical choices that impute negative and positive evaluations, headlines that orient readers towards distinctive understandings of issues and stereotypes that reinforce existing patterns of inequality (Eldridge, 1995; Teo, 2000). Focusing on the outcomes of discursive production as it occurred at the *Irish Independent*, this article identifies five distinct and recurring themes that permeated the newspaper's coverage of this public controversy. In the following pages I analyse the *Irish Independent's* treatment of those themes, exploring how its coverage resonated with dominant ideologies. This analysis

is less concerned with what is 'going on' inside the text itself than with contextualizing and explaining its broader political relevance (Van Dijk, 2006). As the *Irish Independent* proposed unambiguous or 'common sense' positions on controversial issues, it typically failed to acknowledge the validity of alternative viewpoints – specifically those of 'anti-globalization' groupings.

Theme 1 – the consensus imperative

Ireland acceded to the EU presidency in the wake of two constitutional referenda relating to the ongoing project of EU enlargement. Following the Irish electorate's initial rejection of the Nice amendment of 2001, the government re-ran the referendum in 2002 with a more assertive and ultimately successful 'Yes' campaign. Pro-Nice discourses sought to obviate the re-emergence of euro-scepticism by constructing the referendum in feel-good terms; as an opportunity for voters to share the privileges of EU membership with citizens of aspirant states. Welcoming the 'yes' vote in 2002, Bertie Ahern commented:

Our decision shows we remain strongly committed to the European Union, that we fully realize and accept that what is good for the people of Europe is good for the people of Ireland . . . we want to welcome the peoples of the applicant countries into the Union with open hearts as well as open minds. (Ahern, 2002)

This language of consensus was revived at the unveiling of the Irish EU presidency when the Taoiseach (Ahern, 2004a) again solicited popular approval for enlargement, saying the 'Union is testimony to the fact that people prosper when they put their differences aside and focus on what unites them'.

Ahern's emphasis on unity reflects the overwhelming dominance of consensus values within Irish political discourses. In the field of industrial relations, Employer/Trade Union conflict has been sublimated in the name of mutual advantage with the institutionalization of corporatism in the policy-making sphere. It is now widely agreed that the promise of industrial peace, secured through a succession of partnership agreements, created optimal conditions for the emergence of the Celtic Tiger (Allen, 2000; Kirby, 2002, for critical discussions). O'Carroll (2002) argues that the hegemonization of this corporatist paradigm both reveals and reinforces a more general antipathy to the public practice of dissent within mainstream media and political circles. In this climate, consensus is fetishized as an objective in its own right and the democratic value of difference is denied in order to 'get everyone round the table', so that the '*one* right path' can be chosen (O'Carroll, 2002: 17). This logic of consensus strongly underpinned the Irish government's discursive construction

of the 'Day of the Welcomes' and the *Irish Independent's* coverage of the event. By uncritically endorsing a celebration/party frame, the newspaper bracketed the controversial aspects of European integration and recast EU membership in non-divisive apolitical terms.

The mass media is the key source of information about the EU for the majority of European citizens (Oberhuber et al., 2005: 229). However, in the month directly preceding the 'Day of the Welcomes' the *Irish Independent* carried little in the way of dedicated analysis of the political or social implications of EU enlargement, despite one editorial describing it as 'arguably, the most significant development [in Europe] since World War Two' (*Irish Independent*, 2004a, 19 April). In failing to acknowledge, much less comprehensively debate, the contradictions highlighted by groups such as DGN or AEIP, the newspaper effectively framed the EU in non-political terms. Instead its coverage focused on the two most superficial aspects of the accession process, the merry-making planned for Dublin and provincial towns and the high-scale security operation. Reports consistently invoked terms such as 'party', 'fiestas', 'celebrations' and 'festivities' to define the authoritative character of the 'Day of the Welcomes'. 'A cultural explosion of music, dance and art is set to sweep the country during the celebrations' (Anderson, 2004b, 13 April) gushed one report, while upbeat headlines such as 'Fireworks to ensure Euro parties start with a bang' (Melia, 2004b, 29 April) or 'Woolly jumpers: sheep and skydivers to welcome leaders' (Bruce, 2004b, 30 April) prefaced articles that uncritically reproduced the government line on Mayday. The caption 'Czech out the cead mile Malta for the new EU 10' (Anderson, 2004a, 13 April) cleverly integrated the Irish language expression for 'welcome' with the names of two accession states, thus reinforcing the theme of consensus and cooperation. It also openly invited readers to join the weekend's revels, an invitation reiterated by the garda representative who explained that 'the weekend should be a time for celebration and the gardai would like people to enjoy it (Brady and Guidera, 2004, 29 April):

Ireland is perhaps the best example of a member state that has, over the course of its membership, achieved full economic convergence from a position on accession of 60 per cent of the EU's average GDP per capita. That success could not have been achieved without EU membership (Ahern, 2004c).

Ahern's explicit endorsement of the EU's contribution to Irish 'modernization' was echoed in an *Irish Independent* editorial that welcomed the political project of European unification, although in a somewhat competitive spirit:

It worked for us. And we must be careful not to let our own position slip. We welcome our new partners in Europe. We wish them well. But we must never forget that they will be rivals as well as friends. (2004a, 19 April)

Certain that Ireland is a 'role model' for new EU members, the piece also recommended that accession states follow 'in our footsteps' towards modernization and development through the liberalization of their economies and the creation of a pro-investment environment (*Irish Independent*, 2004a, 19 April). This editorial constitutes a prime example of what Colin Coulter (2003: 10–11) has dubbed 'hagiographies of the Celtic Tiger', orthodox and inherently ideological appraisals of Ireland's economic miracle that credit 'fiscal prudence' and reductions in public spending with creating the conditions vital for growth. The *Irish Independent's* faith in neo-liberalism Irish style informed its conviction that similar policies should be applied in new member states: 'The competitive environment these moves produced was the fertile soil in which jobs have grown', a 'lesson' that has 'been eagerly absorbed in the new member states' (*Irish Independent*, 2004a, 19 April). In predicating its enthusiasm for the accession process on the universalization of market principles, the *Irish Independent* also explicitly positioned itself against the kinds of values being expressed by DGN and AEIP campaigners.

Theme 2 – Culture in service of the economy

According to the *Irish Independent* (Anderson, 2004b, 13 April) the 'Day of the Welcomes' presented an opportunity to 'showcase cultural aspects of Ireland, as well as the qualities of our new European neighbours'. In contemporary Ireland, mainstream culture is so closely embedded with and within the value frame of neo-liberal capitalism, 'either as a means of production or as a means of consumption', that, as Peillon (2002: 52) observes, the 'possibility of a critical stance is suppressed, or more simply, not entertained or even imagined'. On the 'Day of the Welcomes' cultural activity was given a platform in order to bolster the illusion of social consensus, contribute to national development objectives and legitimate the project of European cohesion. Arts and Tourism Minister John O'Donoghue acknowledged the symbiotic relationship between this cultural project and longer-term economic imperatives when on 4 May he pronounced the celebrations a 'great success':

It was particularly gratifying to see so many representatives of the new Europe at festivities around the country. It is through these new friendships and this initial exploration of each other's culture that our own regional tourism industry and the tourism industries of these ten new potential holiday destinations will be enriched. (2004)

At the *Irish Independent*, journalists were equally cognisant of culture's economic utility and appraised the weekend festivities as follows:

From Friday to Monday, Ireland will be centre stage in Europe, and in the words of the Defence Forces' Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Jim Sreenan: 'A successful May Day would be very good for the country in terms of tourism and inward investment and it would be a great blow to us if it went off the rails.' (2004b, 27 April)

Likewise, on 30 April Helen Bruce explained how community solidarity, voluntary effort and creativity had been marshalled in the interests of Ireland's development agenda:

North to South, East to West, thousands of people have worked hard in a genuine attempt to *welcome the newcomers* into our lives and our *economies* this weekend. (Bruce, 2004b, italics added)

O'Mahony and Schafer (2005) have diagnosed the Irish government and media's predisposition to evaluate cultural, social and scientific developments from the confines of a narrow frame of economic rationality, a tendency that is clearly discernible in the above citations. Furthermore, because Euro elites favour uncontroversial, 'liberal and politically neutral' platforms for cultural expression (Andersen, 2003: 17), the complex question of difference within and between member states is answered via reified images of distinguishing or idiosyncratic cultural practices. Therefore when *Irish Independent* journalist Helen Bruce wrote, '[W]hat could better sum up this country, and the joys of the established European Union, than a basketball match in Kilkenny, a go-kart display in Waterford and a knitting demonstration in Cork?' (2004b, 30 April), the sanitizing function of this cultural event was made more explicit.

If this was an opportunity for Ireland to bask in the glory of international attention, there was in the *Irish Independent's* coverage a discernible anxiety that our image might be tarnished by protests. Expressing that view explicitly was the 27 April headline, 'For four days we're centre stage – and we can't afford to blow it' (*Irish Independent*, 2004b). Reinforcing it were news pieces such as that of 13 April that empathized with the fears of a government minister:

[Minister O'Donoghue] said it was vital that the event went well and the accession of the 10 new EU states was celebrated in a *fitting* manner, given that 'the eyes of the new European order, if not the world, would be on Ireland.' (Anderson, 2004b, italics added)

The newspaper's framing of the protest 'threat', acknowledged – inadvertently perhaps – the shaky foundations of Irish development, warning that there was 'a feeling that any instigated trouble could ruin Ireland's carefully nurtured international reputation at the high point of our European presidency' (Molony, 2004, 13 April). Implicit in these comments is what O'Seaghda

(2002: 159) has called 'the provincial anxiety to be well thought of in the metropolis', reflecting the fact that Ireland's extraordinary economic growth has been strongly reliant on international markets and foreign direct investment (O'Hearn, 2003). Therefore, while the journalists at the *Irish Independent* heralded Ireland as a formidable example to new EU members, readers were also reminded that in many ways ours is a dependent modern status.

Theme 3 – Disregarding the culture of protest

In positing 1 May as 'Day of the Welcomes', the Irish government and EU reconstructed the day's significance in a way that was at variance with international socialist and social movement discourses. May Day already has widely understood symbolic *and* political meanings: as a traditional Celtic/Pagan festival (Bealtaine), as the Catholic feast day of St Joseph the Worker and, since the 19th century, as the day most associated with both celebratory and confrontational manifestations of labour solidarity. Eric Hobsbawm (1983: 285) has charted the left's appropriation and internationalization of May Day as a 'highly charged festival and rite', originally focused around workers' demands for an eight-hour day but subsequently adapting to reflect the specific political aspirations of local and national labour movements. May Day's politics is overtly expressed through the organizational input and high visibility of the movements and parties of the left. The day also performs a social role insofar as it allows 'workers' to generate and articulate a 'consciousness of their existence as a separate class' (Hobsbawm, 1983: 286). This consciousness or solidarity is expressed through cultural symbols such as flowers, flags, banners and bands. In recent years anti-capitalist activists – such as Reclaim the Streets – have attempted to regenerate and extend May Day's leftist credentials by organizing mass mobilizations and direct actions with varying degrees of success on that date (*Aufheben*, 2002; Harman; 2000). However, Hobsbawm (1983) also recognizes that mainstream political and cultural forces have sought to co-opt the countervailing traditions of May Day, claiming that the 'EEC' (sic) did precisely that when designating May Day an official labour holiday.

Of the 22 articles related to the controversy that were published in the newspaper during April 2004, 15 carried headlines that framed the impending protests as a menace to the order, safety and good humour of Dublin. Teo (2000) argues that because news consumers often fail to read beyond them, headlines significantly influence how readers frame public controversies. The semantic association of protest with chaos in the *Irish Independent's* headlines was underscored by distinctive and provocative lexical choices:

- 'Mayhem alert for May Day' (Brady, 2004a, 1 April)
- 'Security forces primed for May Day protests' (Anderson, 2004b, 13 April)
- 'Razor wire fitted at Farmleigh to deter May 1 protesters' (Quinn, 2004a, 17 April)
- 'Lockdown looms on city streets' (Meila and Lavery, 2004, 29 April)
- 'Violent protest group targets "shutdown city" for weekend' (Brady and Guidera, 2004, 29 April)
- 'Water canons ready for May Day – Gardai are being trained to combat street riots on day of celebration' (Brady, 2004b, 20 April)
- 'Gardai, protesters gear up for showdown on May Day' (Bruce and Murphy, 2004, 19 April)
- '7,500 army and gardai stand by as minister quells anxiety' (Anderson and Lucey, 2004, 30 April)

In this highly charged anticipatory narrative, the *Irish Independent* prophesied a battle fought between binary opposites, the forces of law and order on one side and the forces of disorder on the other. As readers were invited to adopt the subject positions of the security forces, or at least the security conscious, repeated discussions of the scale of the policing operation emphasized the gravity of the impending 'crisis':

- 'GARDAI are being trained in the use of water cannons, which will be key weapons in the force's armoury against rioters attempting to mar the May Day EU celebrations in Dublin' (Brady, 2004b, 20 April)
- 'equipment to cope with street violence will be supplemented by two water cannons on loan to the gardai from the Police Service of Northern Ireland' (Brady, 2004c, 27 April)
- 'Gardai are now on high alert in the run-up to the May Day weekend with 5,000 gardai and 2,500 soldiers rostered on duty in the city over the coming days, as well as the Army Bomb Disposal Unit and the Naval Service' (Anderson and Lucey, 2004, 30 April)

The privileged coverage afforded to the security as opposed to the political significance of May Day can be interpreted as an example of discourse operating as 'dissimulation' (Thompson, 1990). According to Thompson (1990: 61–3) 'dissimulation' refers to those instances when ideology serves to conceal, obscure or deflect attention from relations of domination. *Irish Independent* discourses, in their selection and framing of news reports, paid scant attention to the political controversies and social contradictions precipitating protest against the EU. Nor did they acknowledge, much less seek to interrogate, the symbolic resonance of May Day demonstrations for the left. Instead the newspaper

redirected readers towards the surface manifestations of conflict, possible street violence. This 'violent protester' stereotype has had an important place in media representations of protest (Halloran et al., 1970), discrediting both social movement objectives and their mode of expression. As the *Irish Independent* hyped the prospective violence, it presented a narrative of cause and effect that rationalized the mobilization of police powers against citizens. The threat posed by protesters was most melodramatically contextualized on 27 April, when the spectre of international terrorism was invoked:

Since September 11 and the more recent Madrid bombings, the threat posed by groups linked to the al-Qa'ida terror network cannot be dismissed. And although Ireland is not high on the list of likely targets, an international event which brings together the heads of 25 European countries must hold some attraction for bombers and *all the possible threats* must be taken into account. (*Irish Independent*, 2004b, 27 April, added italics)

Theme 4 – Discrediting 'anti-globalization'

Although the terms 'anti-globalization' or 'anti-capitalism' are contested (*Aufheben*, 2002; Bircham and Charlton, 2001; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Harman, 2000; Starr, 2000), in mainstream media discourses they have become shorthand and unifying representations for a range of dissenting political positions. In Ireland a burgeoning 'anti-globalization movement' has problematized a range of issues including the politics of development, corporate power, privatization of services and the enclosure of public space. In 2002 an indigenous Reclaim the Streets protest/party in central Dublin generated considerable media attention, primarily because violent scenes occurred when police used force in their attempts to control the proceedings. The *Irish Independent's* (Moloney, 2002, 7 May) front-page report on that demonstration carried the heading 'Anti-capitalist protest ends in street battles'. In April 2004 as the *Irish Independent* warned readers of the threat posed by the May Day protests, culpability for the 'imminent' violence was attributed to a broad sweep of so-called anti-globalizers. Articles referred to 'anti-globalization and anti-US protests' (Anderson, 2004b, 13 April) as 'a "Padded Bloc" to resist police' (Bruce and Murphy, 2004, 19 April), 'concern in Government that anti-globalization protesters are intent on wrecking Dublin in May' (Moloney, 2004, 13 April) and 'squatters' (Anderson and Lucey, 2004, 30 April).

In his seminal work *The Whole World is Watching* Gitlin (1980) explores the dialectics of media coverage from an activist perspective. If media coverage offers counter-hegemonic discourses the promise of notoriety, publicity and broader 'social attention', it also carries the threat of 'reification and judgment'

(1980: 246). So it was with the *Irish Independent's* May Day coverage. In two articles entitled 'Gardai and government accused of creating 'climate of fear' for May Day' (Bruce, 2004a, 9 April) and 'Weekend protest party from a rainbow of opinions' (Quinn, 2004b, 30 April), journalists moved beyond the crude anti-globalization label to list the diverse political affiliations of protesters and to publish a timetable of their activities; valuable coverage in Ireland's highest circulation 'quality' weekday paper. In the former piece, high-profile activists attempted to rebut accusations of violence. Nonetheless, the *Irish Independent's* sole attempt to present a 'detailed' analysis of the discourses of anti-globalization was overtly hostile in tone and reductionist in content. In an article entitled 'Seeing through the rhetoric of the anti-globalisers' (28 April 2004), Ian O'Donnell claimed that:

if the anti-globalisers ever get their way and actually drive companies like Nike out of the developing world, that part of the world will have to be given a new name because it will have stopped developing once and for all. . . . it is the very people the anti-globalisers say they wish to help, namely the poor, who would be, and indeed are, their pre-eminent victims.

From the earliest stages of its May Day coverage the *Irish Independent* questioned the appropriateness of anti-globalization protest on this auspicious occasion. Although the protests coincided with an international political summit and interrogated EU policies, an article on 1 April (Brady, 2004a) approvingly quoted an 'anti-terrorist chief' who claimed that the 'Dublin celebrations are very different to Genoa and have no globalization connections but these people seem intent on causing trouble here'.

On 30 April a report entitled 'Here's how the Poles prevent trouble at anti-globalization protests' briefly mentioned the social justice motives of protesters, alluding to participation by 'laid-off miners forced to dig coal out of illegal makeshift pits'. Nonetheless, the article ultimately bolstered the dominant frame of anti-globalization as security problem, suggesting that without a heavy police presence, such events would not be peaceful:

Poland's security services deployed hundreds of police in full riot gear, water cannon were at the ready tucked away in side streets and helicopters clattered overhead. So it's probably no surprise that a march involving thousands of anti-globalisation demonstrators through central Warsaw yesterday went off peacefully. (*Irish Independent*, 2004c, 30 April)

If the cumulative impact of the *Irish Independent* discourses was to cast anti-globalizers as 'troublemakers and violent agitators' (*Irish Independent*, 2004b, 27 April), readers were also encouraged to perceive the aggression as pre-planned and executed with military precision. Significantly, security correspondent Tom Brady filed many of the relevant articles and the most common

informants were the Gardai or security force spokespeople. An article warning that ‘agitators had already been in the country on reconnaissance missions’ (Brady and Guidera, 2004, 29 April) followed claims by ‘overseas intelligence’ – no more definitive source was named – on 20 April ‘that troublemakers intended to target Dublin for well-organised street protests’ (Brady, 2004b). On 17 April the necessity for pre-emptive measures by the army was underlined by yet another conflation of protest with terrorism:

Army engineers took delivery of the wire in preparation for massive security measures being put in place to protect EU heads of state from protesters or terrorist attacks. (Quinn, 2004a)

Aside from attributing sinister motives to anti-globalizers, the above citations also pre-emptively exonerated the Gardai from accusations of heavy-handedness such as were levelled after the 2002 ‘Reclaim the Streets’ debacle. As Tom Brady (2004d) explained on 28 April, ‘the Garda Representative Association are seeking an assurance from Justice Minister Michael McDowell that they will not be scapegoated if the May Day protests at the weekend descend into a riot’.

Theme 5 – Demonising outsiders

The publication of competing calls for protest on the ‘Day of the Welcomes’ reflected tensions within Irish anti-globalization specifically and the international movement generally. A putative ‘socialist/anarchist dichotomy’ (Chesters and Welsh, 2004: 321) relating to tactical expression, organization and political aspiration has been diagnosed at mobilizations including Seattle 1999, Prague S26 and in Genoa. In a movement characterized by diversity there is a race to discursively capture and express its true spirit. ‘Liberal’ commentators have been accused of diluting the conflictual agenda of anti-globalization in favour of a fluffier political message and of contributing to the demonization of anarchists, particularly those who endorse violence against property (*Aufheben*, 2002; Lemisch, 2000). Efforts to impose a unifying hegemony on the movement are also indicative of anarchism’s traditionally negative public image, whereby stereotypes such as the ‘dangerous mad bomber’ or ‘clueless young punk’ abound (Owens and Palmer, 2003: 335). The (anarchist) Irish Workers Solidarity Movement has humorously deconstructed its own experiences of negative publicity where mainstream discourses pose the ‘anarchist infiltrator’ as a symbol of violent extremism:

2003 was a vintage year for the anarchist bogeyman. He could be counted upon to appear whenever public discontent reared its ugly head. Thankfully, our politicians

and media were eternally vigilant to the threat that he posed and were able to spot his plots and warn the easily-led 'ordinary person' to steer clear of him and his ilk. (Feeney, 2004: 1)

Stereotypical images of anarchists are discernible in the *Irish Independent's* May Day coverage. Significantly, when protesters were given the opportunity to answer critics, the spokespeople profiled came from the AEIP grouping rather than the anarchist-oriented DGN. The article on Polish anti-globalization (2004c, 30 April) claimed that 'black-clad, long haired anarchists predominated' while on 13 April a report (Molony, 2004) on the cancellation of a rock concert scheduled to mark accession day invoked the familiar 'anarchist infiltrators' trope. On 19 April the newspaper (Bruce and Murphy, 2004) referred to Indy-media as 'an anarchist group' and used the sinister term 'intelligence' when describing its publicly accessible and openly shared postings. Even when the word 'anarchism' was not actually used, the *Irish Independent* negatively framed anarchist activism. On 1 April, Tom Brady informed readers that:

Many of the organisers of the protests were involved in the May Day clashes that resulted in violence on Dublin streets in 2002 and in last year's anti-war confrontations with gardai in Shannon and in the capital. (2004a)

This is a reference to direct actions staged by Reclaim the Streets and Grassroots Network Against War, groups with strong anarchist associations. On 30 April a report claimed that the arrest of three UK nationals and police searches of Dublin squats had links to well-known anarchists, the 'Wombles': 'raids on a number of unoccupied homes and flats in Dublin have recovered protective padding, spray paint, "Womble" stencils and bleach' (Anderson and Lucy, 2004).

Given the *Irish Independent's* endorsement of European integration, it is ironic that its coverage of the protests consistently represented other Europeans in disparaging and menacing terms. Under the headline 'Mobile agitators head for May Day protests' (2004c, 27 April), Tom Brady warned readers that 'up to a hundred troublemakers are targeting Dublin for street confrontations during the May Day weekend'. This claim was based on 'intelligence reports' from 'police forces in Britain and on mainland Europe' (27 April). By 29 April the apparent threat had amplified – both rhetorically and visually – with reports that a 'HARDCORE group of up to 300 international troublemakers is planning to target Dublin at the weekend', their purpose 'to cause mayhem' (Brady and Guidera, 2004). For journalists at the *Irish Independent*, it was not only the malevolent intentions of the 'international brigade' (Brady, 2004b, 20 April) that prompted alarm, but also their duplicitous tactics. Allegedly, 'International agitators operate by attempting to provoke gardai into confrontation and then blame them for causing violence' (Brady, 2004d, 28 April).

Witness here what Thompson (1990: 60) terms ‘expurgation of the other’, where discourse works to classify and demonize the alien, in this case the non-Irish protester, and so fragment a potential counter-hegemonic movement. An inflammatory article published on 30 April openly pitted guileless or peaceful Irish protesters against the outsiders:

While thousands of people are expected to take to the street to mount peaceful protests, it is feared that the events will be hijacked by a hardcore of 300 extremist international protesters intent on causing disturbance and violent disorder. (Anderson and Lucey, 2004)

In effect the newspaper might be judged to have hedged its bets somewhat, acknowledging a possible measure of popular support for protests, but simultaneously claiming that mischievous minorities would upend legitimate intentions:

[T]his group has featured prominently in street violence in other European cities in the recent past and, usually, its members operate by infiltrating peaceful protest movements and attempting to remain anonymous until they are near a potential flashpoint. (Brady, 2004c, 27 April)

The theme of infiltration, also invoked to isolate anarchists, was resurrected in a xenophobic construction of European and UK protesters. Given that the EU seeks to encourage the free transit of citizens between member countries, the *Irish Independent’s* position seems all the more incongruous.

Conclusion

On 27 April *Irish Independent* journalist J. S. Doyle listed some of the competing events scheduled for the May holiday, informing readers that:

It all sounds like good harmless fun, and there is no indication that any of these events, demonstrations and protests will be anything other than peaceful. However, there is a degree of over-excitement in some quarters. The Garda Representative Association newsletter has warned of ‘mindless thuggery’ from protesters who plan to ‘usurp’ the EU’s big day. There is talk in certain newspapers of gangs of violent anarchists flocking to Dublin to cause trouble. (2004)

Superficially at least, Doyle’s article restored a measure of balance to the *Irish Independent’s* partisan coverage. As well as generating potentially useful publicity for the demonstrations, it also ridiculed the law and order frenzy that had typified print media coverage:

‘We’ll gas Bertie’ was the supposed quote from somebody in the *Irish Sun*; the same paper that warned that anarchists were threatening to release ‘enough gas to kill 10,000 Dubliners’.

Doyle thus acknowledged the invidious role of those newspapers: exaggerating expectations of mayhem and demonizing protesters. His comments reflected on the conduct of tabloids such as 'the *Sun*' and the newspaper he ironically dubbed the 'venerable upholder of liberal standards':

Last Sunday's Irish edition of the *Observer* carried on its front page a report from its 'Ireland editor' that the centre of Dublin will be transformed into 'a virtual fortress' for next weekend's summit.

Interestingly, 'other' newspapers – incidentally both British owned – are accused of partial and inaccurate reporting, but there is no admission of the *Irish Independent's* own role in constructing and reinforcing the dominant anticipatory narrative.

The occasion of the 'Day of the Welcomes', signifying the high water mark of the Irish Presidency and the accession of new states, might have initiated a national conversation about the costs and benefits of EU membership. As the highest circulation daily in the Irish Republic, the *Irish Independent* was ideally placed to stimulate and provide a forum for that conversation. Instead, grim prophesies of violence displaced political debate as the focus of coverage. European integration was framed in spectacular terms – appropriately a party but problematically a potential riot – rather than an ongoing and controversial set of economic and political processes. Articles actively encouraged citizens to participate in the weekend's events as audiences, cultural ambassadors or welcoming hosts: in effect, the newspaper urged passive and uncritical endorsement of the European project. Its coverage also constructed that participation in instrumental terms. Apparently, the May Day celebrations should be judged according to their economic legacy – tourism, inward investment and the enhanced reputation of a modern and ambitious country. In both tone and content the *Irish Independent* replicated official discourses on the Day of the Welcomes. As the Taoiseach, government ministers, garda representatives, journalists and security correspondents presented a seamless and authoritative vision for the weekend, alternative or dissenting visions were ruled offside. According to the dominant anticipatory narrative, protest would shame the nation and spoil the 'people's' fun.

Norman Fairclough (1999: 75) argues that in contemporary society the discourses of global capitalism hold particular sway and that 'people's lives are increasingly shaped by representations which are produced elsewhere'. Those discourses constitute a permanent backdrop against which the 'common sense' of economics and politics is constructed; a common sense that seems all the more compelling now that global capitalism transcends citizen and state regulation. Commentators (Coulter, 2003; O'Carroll, 2002; O'Seaghda, 2002; Peillon, 2002) observe how a narrowly circumscribed concept of economic

rationality dominates the Irish public sphere, serving as the first, and often, only basis for evaluating social, cultural and political affairs. As they proclaimed the incontestable virtues of competition, economic growth and reduced public spending, *Irish Independent* reports invoked this hegemonic frame. Furthermore, because the newspaper constructed Euro-enthusiasm and neo-liberalism in populist terms as 'the' common sense, this discursive space was closed off to opposing or even more substantive argumentation. Significantly, reports did not consider at length or actively rebut alternative political positions. Instead the ideological thrust of the *Irish Independent's* coverage was underscored by repeated inferences and innuendo regarding the dangerous and alien character of protesters. Ominous headlines and a provocative lexicon were invoked to expose the 'others' – anarchists, foreign activists and anti-globalizers – in our midst. The newspaper thus marginalized and discredited protesters and, more fundamentally, protest itself as violent, subversive and unpatriotic.

In the lead up to the 'Day of the Welcomes' activists were acutely sensitive to their negative portrayal in mainstream media discourses and at Irish Indy-media⁶ activist-contributors repeatedly condemned the hysterical headlines and disparaging commentaries to which they were subjected. Critical media theorists (Gitlin, 1980; Halloran et al., 1970; Ketchum, 2004) recognize that 'publicity' is a poor substitute for 'public debate', if social movements secure notoriety rather than political advancement in the pages of mainstream newspapers. In this instance, protesters infiltrated the dominant media frame, but as deviants not credible actors. Protesters were afforded a limited right of reply, i.e. to defend themselves against the charges of violence that the newspaper had pre-emptively laid against them. On the Indymedia website and through their own newspapers, networks and circulars, activists from DGN and the AEIP attempted to cultivate an alternative public sphere, within which diverse perspectives on Europe might be exchanged. Therefore, we cannot assume that the *Irish Independent*, or indeed other mainstream media outlets, conclusively determined the Irish people's expectations of the 'Day of the Welcomes'. It is probable, however, that the *Irish Independent's* status as market-leading newspaper enhanced the commonsense appeal of its partisan construction of the events that were to follow.

Notes

- 1 The head of government or prime minister of the Republic of Ireland.
- 2 <http://www.eu2004.ie>
- 3 <http://www.freewebs.com/anotheruropeispossible>
- 4 <http://www.independentnewsmedia.com/corp.htm>

- 5 <http://www.independentnewsmedia.com/corp.htm>
 6 <http://www.indymedia.ie>

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