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‘Subvert and Survive’: Soft Power and Popular Resistance at the Transcultural Edges of Hegemony

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‘Subvert and Survive’:
Soft Power and Popular Resistance at the
Transcultural Edges of Hegemony

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A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirement for
the award of
PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) by Prior Publications

Dublin Institute of Technology
Aungier Street
School of Media

Supervisors: Dr Alan Grossman, Dr Michael Foley

October 2016
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis, which I now submit for examination for the award of PhD (doctor of philosophy) is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for PhD by Prior Publication of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in any other institute or university. The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the Institute’s guidelines for ethics in research.

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Signature

Date
This thesis, in three parts, documents and conceptualises a range of political and cultural activities that either sustain or challenge existing structures of power. It seeks to answer the question: how can we conjoin a Gramscian theoretical framework and the insights of transculturalism to understand and investigate practices of dominance and resistance operating in close cultural and ideological proximity to those they oppose? Drawing upon an understanding that a successful hegemonic discourse, one that earns consent and minimises conflict, must in some sense contain, and thus control, its own opposite, Part 1 of the thesis – divided into three chapters, constituting an overarching critical discussion – elaborates a theoretical framework that is transcultural, a view of culture deeply embedded in politics and resistant to the limits of national boundaries and essentialisms; that understands hegemony both as an account of bourgeois power and a programme for a praxis of popular resistance; and that seeks to develop a politically useful spatial metaphor, or set of metaphors, for locating a set of events and encounters in the hegemonic borderlands. In Part 2, the thesis examines a series of hegemonic ‘soft power’ institutions and actors that achieve success, it is argued, through their adoption of discourses that speak of social justice and responsibility; in Part 3, it examines a set of resistance practices that work in the popular sphere, close to the institutions that they challenge.

The previously published chapters in Parts 2 and 3 each address a distinct topic. In Part 2, where the critique of allegedly neutral and liberal institutions is developed, the subject matter includes the following: foundations offering financial support for journalistic work; Ireland’s main elite newspaper, the Irish Times; the role of media in Ireland’s property and financial crisis; media treatment of anti-war groups; European fisheries policy; racial profiling within the Irish immigration regime; and finally Bono, the celebrity humanitarian. In Part 3, a diverse set of resistance practices from the distant and recent past is documented and analysed: Bruce Springsteen’s work since 2005; an Irish-Chartist newspaper published in Leeds in the 1840s; theatrical and cinematic interpretations of Jim Gralton, an Irish socialist activist of the 1930s; direct action against US military aircraft at Shannon Airport; solidarity actions with the Welsh mother and family of Wikileaks whistleblower Chelsea Manning; a visit to Gaza with a group of Irish activists; and efforts to tell migrant stories in Ireland in the sphere of popular publishing and media. The thesis proposes that the Deluzian concept of ‘the line of flight’ and transculturalism’s emphasis on contact zones are analytical tools for developing a renewed understanding of Gramscian hegemony. ‘War of position’, it is argued, is not static but is, rather, a contest over the orientation and delineation of variable and transversal boundaries. The thesis thus offers itself as a purposefully diverse, transdisciplinary body of research practice that exemplifies how such borderlands can be critically explored.
Acknowledgments

My thanks go first and foremost to my supervisor Alan Grossman, whose collegiality and support over many years helped to make this work possible, and whose input on its assembly and presentation has been invaluable. In addition, his co-supervisor Michael Foley merits special mention for his friendship and inspiration, as an achiever of the PhD by Prior Publications, as well as for countless acts of guidance, intended and serendipitous.

Two chapters in this thesis are co-authored and thanks go, of course, to all those named, but most especially to Colin Coulter and Gavan Titley, comrades more than co-anythings. They have been the most unassuming but nonetheless helpful of intellectual and political guides for many years, and their influence looms over far more of this work than the few pages that carry their names.

Andy Storey’s friendship and guidance date back more than 30 years. Conversations with him are hidden everywhere in this thesis, and the structuring logic of its sequencing originated over yet another revelatory pint with him.

At Dublin Institute of Technology, I owe a debt of gratitude to a series of academic managers/friends who did their best, even in straitened circumstances, to facilitate my research. They include most especially Kate Shanahan and Nora French, as well as Barbara O’Shea, Eddie Brennan and Hugh McAtamney. Brian O’Neill, now DIT’s director of research, has also been a great support in that and other roles he has played over the 14 years I have worked with him.

My daughters Louisa, Cara and Stella are constant sources of excitement, each brilliant in her own way, each drawing me to a new set of interests and knowledge. Being up close to Cara’s college education since 2014 has provided the final neural jolt to help me comprehend and complete this work.

Words really cannot express what it means to share a life with Catherine Ann Cullen – or at least my own words cannot: finding myself in her wonderful poetry is among my greatest prides and pleasures. We have ridden the research rollercoaster side by side for many years now, and by sheer but encouraging coincidence we find ourselves gliding to the end of the doctoral ride together.
Chapter 5 of the Graduate Research Regulations of Dublin Institute of Technology (7th Edition), dealing with the PhD by Prior Publications, is not restrictive in relation to the form in which such prior publications are presented. However, in keeping with guidelines in chapter 4 of the same regulations, and in line with the advice offered by those who have completed this form of PhD recently, I have chosen to present all the material uniformly, formatting what the regulations call the ‘overarching critical document’ in Part 1 in the same way as the previously published material in Parts 2 and 3; the latter pieces, imported and standardised from final pre-print versions or scanned and converted from print, are designated as chapters in the thesis. This marks a minor technical deviation from the nearest precedent for my work, set by my journalistic and academic colleague Michael Foley (2013), who presented his publications in the form of PDFs downloaded from DIT’s own online repository or other sources.

In converting the work to a uniform format for all three parts of the thesis, I have of course made no changes in the texts of previously published material – except for the following: in chapter 2.7, the renumbering of endnotes in the excerpted material from my second book, to avoid confusion; in chapters 3.1 and 3.3, removal of HTML mark-up from online publications; and in chapter 3.7 the removal of references to a tracks on a DVD that accompanied the original publication.

This ‘conversion’ approach to the publications simply aims to facilitate the reader not only with a more consistent reading experience, but also more navigable pagination, by allowing me to present the thesis with a clear table of contents. It would not, however, have been appropriate to alter the referencing styles of each of the prior publications, so while the new Part 1 has a consistent style for in-text citations and its own bibliography, the chapters that follow reflect the varying approaches to citation of their different publishers.
Chronological List of Publications

**PR indicates a peer-reviewed journal or volume**


Coulter, C., H. Browne, R. Flynn, V. Hetherington, G. Titley (2016) “‘These people protesting might not be so strident if their own jobs were on the line”: Representations of the economic consequences of opposition to the Iraq war in the Irish national press’. *Media War and Conflict* 9: 113-136. PR
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Part 1

Overarching Critical Document
Chapter 1.1
Introduction: Subvert and Survive

By ‘political’ I mean having to do with power: who’s got it, who wants it, how it operates; in a word, who’s allowed to do what to whom, who gets what from whom, who gets away with it and how.

Margaret Atwood, *Second Words* (Atwood, 2011: 353)

Non è di maggio questa impura aria
der la giardino straniero
fa ancora più buio, o l’abbaglia

con cieche schiarite…

*It’s not like May, this impure air*
*that the dark foreign garden*
*makes even darker, or blinds it*

*with bursts of light…*

Pier Paolo Pasolini (2014: 1), *Le Ceneri di Gramsci (Gramsci’s Ashes)*

The works and excerpts submitted in Parts 2 and 3 of this thesis constitute a small fraction of the writing I have produced for publication over the last decade. Even after a critical process of selection, their most obvious quality, perhaps, is diversity: they are written for books, journals, newspapers, magazines, websites; their audiences are academic, mainstream, literary, national and international – one of them is aimed at a parliamentary committee. Nonetheless, reflecting my ‘both/and’ status as academic/journalist, and complicating any effort to distinguish between research and professional practice, the works are characterised by significant methodological

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1 Antonio Gramsci’s ashes are buried in the non-Catholic cemetery in southern Rome. Known locally as the ‘foreign cemetery’, it is the burial place of non-Italians who died in Italy such as Shelley and Keats. The translation of Pasolini is my own.
crossover and intellectual unity: despite their varying tones, registers and purposes, they deal with and are informed by a coherent area of exploration, mode of enquiry and analytical framework. As will become clear, a third subject-position, that of activist, is a further constitutive element of my practice, in dialogue with academic and journalist; and while none of these roles can be regarded as preeminent, the activist’s impulse toward politically useful intellectual work lies behind much of the coherence that I retrospectively claim for a selection of material drawn from, and critically engaging with, a wide range of contingent circumstances, cultural artefacts and social actions in a variety of locations.

A large proportion of what follows takes its political imperative from Foucault’s famous injunction:

[T]he real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them (Foucault and Chomsky, n.d.).

However, beyond Foucault, the guiding principles for the research and writing here were laid down by Antonio Gramsci: both his analysis of those elements of the hegemonic apparatus that seek to rule through consent rather than coercion, and his insight and prescriptions on building counter-hegemonic forces. A Gramscian approach understands that a successful hegemonic discourse, one that earns consent and minimises conflict, must in some sense contain, and thus control, its own opposite. As Ernesto Laclau puts it: ‘A class is hegemonic… to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralised’ (Laclau, 1977: 161). Gramsci himself writes of a situation wherein ‘the
snake bites the snake-charmer – in other words the demagogue is the first victim of his own demagogy’ (Gramsci, 1971: 179). The metaphor encourages us to see the hegemon as capable of manipulating what could otherwise be dangerous; but it also reminds us that, nonetheless, the snake can sometimes bite.²

The structural division of Parts 2 and 3 of this thesis, as I will elaborate, follows from that metaphor. Part 1 offers a (newly written) critical overview, consisting of three chapters of ascending length and complexity: the present introduction, followed by a methodological account of the contents of the prior publications, and then a necessarily selective exploration of relevant theory. Part 1’s relation to the rest of the thesis can be regarded as supplementary and explanatory, providing the reader with extra fuel for the journey that follows, by offering both specific context and wider constructs for a critical understanding of methodological and theoretical continuities and choices in the selected works. In Parts 2 and 3, each of the previously published works, either in its entirety or in excerpts, is presented as a single chapter. (Chapter 3.1 and chapter 3.3 are the exceptions, each comprising two or more separately published articles dealing with closely related subjects – the recent works of Bruce Springsteen in 3.1 and, in 3.3, the legacy of Jim Gralton.) Part 2 examines the snake-charmers – its chapters probe and critique a set of ‘soft power’ hegemonic institutions and individuals, mostly but not exclusively from civil society, that had not previously been subject to a sustained analysis of this sort, and its targets conform to Foucault’s instruction: the liberal foundations such as Herbert Sandler’s that ‘rescue’ investigative journalism from its funding crisis while ensuring it will never challenge their fundamental interests and

² Joseph A. Buttigieg warns against ‘the practice of fishing in [Gramsci’s] text for single phrases... to embellish just about any kind of argument’ (in Santucci, 2010: 16). I freely admit here that I am taking the snake quote out of its original context, and do not mean to enlist its author to my particular use of the metaphor. In chapter 1.3 I engage directly with what I take to be the intentional meanings and implications of the work of Gramsci and his interpreters.
most treasured relationships; a liberal newspaper, the *Irish Times*, that presents itself as a watchdog against the powerful but also serves as a pillar of the social and economic order; media institutions that join with governments to police the limits of opposition to Ireland’s role in US wars; the European fisheries policy that in the name of equity and ecology wreaks social and environmental havoc across the world, by omission and commission enriching large multinational corporations; the celebrity humanitarian who advances the interests of western states, companies and NGOs by talking about equality and the eradication of poverty. In each case, the discourse emanating from such figures and institutions contains sufficient levels of truth and enough earnest demand for social change (much of it almost certainly sincere) to make it plausible, but its structural relation to centres of material and ideological power ensures that it ultimately protects those centres rather than critiquing them.

Then, in Part 3, the metaphorical snakes: the snake is not merely someone advancing counter-hegemonic ideas and interests – she or he needs to be close enough to the snake-charmer to bite. I call this ‘popular resistance’, drawing (in tribute to one of my historical subjects, Feargus O’Connor) upon Raymond Williams’ application of the word ‘popular’ to Britain’s mid-19th-century working-class press, with a ‘transitional’ definition of the word that is neither fully political nor entirely market-centred: ‘a skilful and vigorous combination of generalized political attitudes with the established popular reading material’ (*Williams*, 1978: 49). Thus, this section deals extensively with the work of cultural practitioners operating, without obscurity, in mainstream forms and using accessible political ideas as means of undermining dominant power relations. These include O’Connor, an Irish-born newspaper proprietor of the 1830s and ’40s, whose Leeds-based Northern Star used a vivid vocabulary of Irish stories and rhymes; a playwright and a rapper encountered in Gaza, using their work to resist
multiple oppressions from Israel and Hamas; immigrant journalists telling migrant stories in a radio-friendly format; Bruce Springsteen, who has done radical political work while maintaining mainstream visibility; anti-war activists swinging implements, including an inflatable hammer straight off the football terraces, at an American navy plane; Irish musicians performing at working-class clubs and pubs in Wales in support of Wikileaks whistleblower Chelsea Manning and her Welsh family.

In dividing the work in this way, I am proposing a boundary between what one might call, in Gramscian vernacular, the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic; much of Part 1, however, is devoted to exploring and problematising such boundaries, acknowledging that, intellectually, they lie in contested territory. Most of the people, institutions and discourses I discuss are liminal, residing on the edges of hegemony, and the theoretical map of these borderlands remains to be drawn. Indeed, the very notion of such a map is something of an invitation to debate: are the borders too porous, or in need of relocation? If I hesitate at assuming the seeming role of a righteous map-maker with a penchant for border patrol, I remind myself that I regard the work not as defining moral categories but as developing analytical tools for political agency. Structurally speaking, the ‘hard case’, the task of differentiating the two multi-millionaire liberal rock-stars, Bono and Bruce Springsteen, is both the thesis’s centre and its frontier, the place where it slips across its own border. Thus I begin Part 3 shortly after the snake makes a speech inducting the charmer into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame – and bites him in the process.

There are other common threads. Even the works that are firmly located within Irish concerns, notably the boom-bust cycle of the last decade and its consequences, tend to locate them in global processes. And the global process overhanging most of the work here is American imperium and persistent resistance to it (including the
imperial/resistant ‘offshoot’ in Israel/Palestine): most of these published works are, to an extent that I must confess surprises me, 21st-century war stories. Furthermore, a notable proportion of the protagonists, on all sides of the metaphorical war being fought in these pages, shape their subjective understanding of their fights in terms of religious adherence and faith: U2 and Springsteen; the Pitstop Ploughshares who damaged a US war-plane, and the priests who drove Jim Gralton from Ireland. In chapter 3.6 I find myself in the literal shadow of an ostentatious mosque rising over Gaza’s beach. By and large, for reasons that may be autobiographical (see below), I keep my distance, maintain a certain awe of the faithful – looking, if I look at all, at how faith is instrumentalised rather than at faith itself.

The selected works are conjunctural and historical – conjunctural in that they concern themselves with the arrangement of power relations at particular moments in time (Gilbert, 2008), attentive to both structural and contingent features; historical insofar as those moments of explored conjuncture are generally not the time of writing – and many of the chapters deal with the dimensions of past conjunctural shifts. They are semiotic and ethnographic – providing subversive readings of familiar discursive signifiers, from Bono to fishing boats to the Irish Times, while offering immersive description of people and cultures, sometimes from the perspective of a participant observer. They are both Irish and transcultural, in their subject matter and in their form; the two books, in particular, are partly ‘translations’ of Irish phenomena for international audiences – such translation being just one form of the ‘trans’ (the crossing, the movement, the encounter, the interpenetration, the potential for effect and change) that makes the idea of the ‘transcultural’ a rewarding one for exploring issues and experiences of cultural contact and multiplicity (Ortiz, 1995; Welsch, 1999).
The title attached to this chapter and to the thesis as a whole, ‘Subvert and Survive’, was a favourite saying of my father, Henry J. Browne, a radical Catholic priest of some notoriety in the New York of the 1960s. Over the years, I have quoted it less than I ought, in my political zeal feeling a little embarrassed about the second verb. Survival sounded to me like a suspiciously minimalist goal! I have managed, though, to learn something about the resistance that lurks in the word ‘survive’: from the inexorable process of growing older, but also from Palestinians who showed me their famous sumoud (steadfastness), and from an understanding of the sort of utopian ‘making-do’ in everyday life that Michel de Certeau (2011) eulogises. My ambivalence was also personal. In her published memoir of their relationship, my mother Flavia Alaya (2001) introduces Henry’s ‘subvert and survive’ soundbite as an explanation of how he drew his political strength from being within, and representing, the Catholic Church. ‘Subvert and survive’ explained, even excused, the fact that every weekend he would retrace his line of flight, returning from his secret family in a little New Jersey apartment, back to St Gregory’s on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, in time to say mass to his parish congregation and start another week of urban activism. At some level ‘subvert and survive’ seemed like a formula for evasion of what was most important, that is the child that was me. But, in truth, he survived long enough to leave the parish in 1970, when I was six, and be a good father to his children, a good man to his woman, until his death in 1980; for a decade he survived, transitioned from Father Browne, activist-pastor, to Professor Browne, activist-sociologist, finding new spaces and angles from which to challenge power. Survival for him was not a static state of being but a dynamic process, something you did so you could subvert again, and survive, and so on.... I do not dwell on the phrase elsewhere in this thesis, but its dual imperatives lurk with intent in my understanding of Gramscian hegemony and praxis.
In 2016, Flavia is still an activist on several fronts: she survives, and subverts. This thesis reflects with love on those like my parents who approach close enough to power to sense its charms – but who still have venom in their fangs.

A Note on Peer Review

As an academic researcher, reviewer and sometime editor of a peer-reviewed journal (Irish Communications Review), I respect, understand and value the section of the regulations on the PhD by Prior Publications that stipulates that the submission ‘should normally’ contain at least three items that first appeared in peer-reviewed publications. My submission certainly meets that important criterion. However, in my own circumstances I am grateful that those regulations also actively invite the inclusion of other sorts of publications (‘book chapters, monographs, books, scholarly editions of a text, technical reports, creative work in relevant areas, or other artefacts’), which in the thesis I view as integral to the work as a whole, rather than as a lesser species being used to fill in gaps. All of the chapters I am submitting from outside the realm of academic peer review contain work that has been through various robust processes of review, before and/or after publication, that speak as loudly to their intellectual worth, cultural significance, social impact and contribution to knowledge as a journal’s peer-review exercise might do.

Chapter 2.3, my opening statement as an expert witness on the media to the Oireachtas banking inquiry,\textsuperscript{3} is illustrative. No sooner was this research published than I was being questioned about it for two hours by an eager committee of elected parliamentarians,\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{3} This was a committee established by the two houses of the Irish parliament to probe the causes and consequences of the ‘banking crisis’ in Ireland.
armed with questions prepared by diligent researchers who had prior access to the work. (I believe it emerged unscathed, and my testimony featured in the committee’s final report (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2016).) The statement and the questioning also received media attention beyond the committee room. Similar media attention was directed, some years earlier, at chapter 2.2, a glossy magazine’s cover story about the political direction of the Irish Times, which was discussed and debated on radio, and later cited in Mark O’Brien’s (2008) definitive history of that newspaper.

Three chapters in this submission (‘Where Will They Get the Fish?’, 2.5, ‘Barrier Methods’, 2.6, and ‘Gaza Diary’, 3.6) were first published in the quarterly literary journal Dublin Review, which is famous – if not notorious – for the selective, careful and challenging work of its founder and long-time editor, Brendan Barrington. The first two of those articles had after-lives that testify further to some merit: ‘Barrier Methods’ was anthologised, in full, in Penguin’s Great Irish Reportage, a volume containing a near-century’s worth of important journalism; the long article on the Irish fishing industry was spotted by the editor of a specialist British-based journal, Marine Quarterly, who commissioned a revised and updated version of it to appear in those pages – a rare outing there for a non-specialist writer.

Publication of my first book, Hammered by the Irish, was made possible by support from the US writer and activist Kathy Kelly. It was also praised by probably America’s preeminent post-King philosopher of non-violent direct action, Daniel Berrigan, who contributed a foreword. More surprisingly, perhaps, it was cited repeatedly in The Untouchables, a bestselling book about Irish elites by independent member of the Irish parliament Shane Ross (now a government minister) and his co-author Nick Webb
(Webb and Ross, 2012). Citation in such a work of investigative journalism is some indication of the originality and importance of my own inquiry.

Having negotiated the editorial process with editor Audrea Lim and others at Verso, The Frontman (my second book) was a case of what we might call ‘public-sphere review’. Subjected to scathing attacks by two journalists in Irish newspapers (O’Connor, 2013; O’Loughlin, 2013) for being leftist and intemperate, respectively, it was received with thoughtful and largely favourable attention elsewhere, and I was drawn into interviews and arguments all around the world. Global development specialists Alex de Waal (in a back-cover blurb) and George Monbiot praised it, as did Terry Eagleton, in a long review in the Guardian (Eagleton, 2013; Monbiot, 2013). The Los Angeles Review of Books mulled it over at even greater length (Prasse-Freeman, 2013). Italy’s translation of The Frontman was initiated and carried out by one of that country’s most important writer-intellectuals, Roberto Bui, better known by his pseudonym Wu Ming 1, co-author of historical novel Q as well as many other books (Browne, 2014).

The analysis of works of cultural resistance in Part 3 has yielded the most satisfying kind of review: gratitude from artists themselves (including three, cited here, whom I have never met) for ‘getting’ what they were trying to achieve. After I wrote about Jimmy’s Hall (chapter 3.3), screenwriter Paul Laverty wrote to say that the article ‘encompass[ed] the entire debate we have been having over last 18 months about the crisis in criticism and so many reviewers hiding behind film references instead of wrestling with the ideas and hinterland’. He added kindly: ‘Your piece is bristling with insight.’

Then director Ken Loach chimed in too, writing: ‘Just a note to say thanks for the piece you wrote about Jimmy’s Hall. You really understood the film and the reason

4 email to author, June 5, 2014
we tried to tell the story. I wish the others had the same perception!’ Pleasing as these were, they could not quite compete with the email I received from Bruce Springsteen’s manager, Jon Landau, in 2007, after I wrote about *Magic* (chapter 3.1): ‘Loved it. So did Bruce. Told me that he thought this was the deepest and most insightful piece he expects to read about the CD.’ Fan that I was and remain, I will be fortunate indeed if I ever receive any reward at all for my intellectual work, let alone any anonymous reviewer’s comment, that I value as highly as that email.

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5 email to author, June 6, 2014
6 email to author, September 27, 2007
Chapter 1.2
Crossing Boundaries of Discipline and Method

The published works in Parts 2 and 3 explore the boundaries between power and resistance, and themselves reside in the methodological borderlands of my practice as simultaneously journalist and academic. The issues and places they explore are more often than not transcultural and transnational, occasionally transitional, difficult to locate within a single stable polity or set of cultural practices, and the frictions and forces at play in them are frequently consequences of that instability and liminality. And while they share these qualities, the chapters are, on the face of them, about many different things. I attempt to explain their theoretical coherence, and the consequent contribution to knowledge, in chapter 1.3. First, it is important to explain what each of them set out to accomplish within its own context and discipline, while highlighting the transdisciplinarity that is a quality of the works viewed individually and collectively.

Before proceeding to this piece-by-piece explanation, there is an important methodological and tonal distinction to be made between the chapters collected in Part 2 of this work and those that appear in Part 3. Part 2, ‘Soft Power’, is fundamentally a set of investigations, both journalistic and academic, that seek to uncover new information and/or produce new knowledge about the workings of various institutions, from charitable foundations to the EU fisheries-inspection regime, from national newspapers to the police who monitor people crossing the Irish border. The methodological and intellectual starting point, in each case, is a posture of radical scepticism toward those institutions and the benign intentions in which they cloak themselves. The desired outcome, in each case, is to offer readers a clearer
understanding of how the institutions advance the interests of those who already hold the bulk of political, social and economic power in the fields where they operate – while acknowledging the credibility of their embrace of ostensibly counter-hegemonic concerns about freedom, equality, justice and accountability. In contrast, the works collected in Part 3, ‘Popular Resistance’, are more celebratory than sceptical; they set out to demonstrate the possibility of exemplary forms of counter-hegemonic political and cultural practice. They are not, I hope, rose-tinted accounts of those forms, but are instead cognisant of the limitations and contingencies within which resistance is inscribed when it operates in close proximity to the power it opposes and contests – from Chelsea Manning inside a US army base to Bruce Springsteen inside the corporate music industry; from Ken Loach challenging conventional historical narratives of the Irish past to Feargus O’Connor wielding history as a weapon to break down national and sectarian boundaries between English and Irish workers. For all the appreciation I evince for such figures, I am cognisant methodologically of the need to locate our celebrations within a rigorous study of political context; thus these resisters are never far, even in my more enthusiastic passages, from ultimate failure. Forms and blocs that seem for a time to be emergent, from the revolutionary alliances of 1848 to the global antiwar movement of 2003, don’t quite emerge.

I will return to that shadow of failure in due course, but first there is the spectre of ‘Soft Power’. Chapters 2.1 to 2.4 are, at first glance, the most conventional works here in terms of the expectations of an academic in the field of journalism research. Two of them (2.1 and 2.4) were written for and published in leading media-studies journals; the other two were researched and produced on commission based on that academic status – one commission from the editor of a popular, though now defunct, magazine who wished to explore the political direction of the *Irish Times*, and the other from the
members of a parliamentary committee investigating the Irish banking crisis and the
media’s role in it. The critical knowledge about the institutions under consideration in
these works is generated largely, though not exclusively, through the amassing of new
empirical information, supplemented by analysis. And while chapter 2.4 is based upon a
rigorous and unprecedented content trawl through Irish national newspapers, the new
knowledge in chapters 2.1 and 2.2 flows mainly from interviews with people directly
involved in the issues and cases under consideration. This reliance on interviews, the
most stereotypically journalistic of methods, was disconcerting to readers in both
instances: one of the peer reviewers at Journalism Studies wondered if the foundation
article was not a little too much like journalism in this respect; and the editor of The
Dubliner magazine said he had hoped to read more definitive statements in my own
voice about the politics of the Irish Times, rather than what seemed to him more like a
diverse collection of opinions from so many named and anonymous sources.

As both journalist and academic, I am keenly aware of the limits and caveats when
relying heavily on interview material. In both these publications the approach was
dictated by a combination of the impenetrability of the subject material by archival and
other methods and by my own choices about what would constitute the most coherent
approach to the complexity of that material. For ‘Foundation-Funded Journalism’ I had,
on the one hand, a then-small and neglected body of critical research about the
influence of charitable foundations on intellectual and cultural work (e.g. Roelofs,
2007); and on the other hand, a small but growing body of journalism and journalistic
organisations being funded by such foundations. The rare previous attempts to apply a
critical political-economy framework specifically to foundation funding of media
(Edmonds, 2002; Feldman, 2007) had dealt largely in generalities, and I determined that
a case-study approach, focussing on specific organisational concerns and conflicts of
interest, might usefully advance this neglected area of research. There was, however, precious little extant and high-quality third-party organisational data and analysis about the three foundation-funded journalistic organisations I chose to examine – ProPublica, the Centre for Public Inquiry and Transitions Online. This meant that for ProPublica I was forced to rely for my research upon journalistic reports of its operations, while for the latter two I turned to interviews with its most important actors. I interviewed Jeremy Druker, director of Transitions Online, in Prague in January 2009, and Frank Connolly, former director of the Centre for Public Inquiry, in Dublin a few weeks later.

Like Foley (2013) I vigorously defend journalism as a field (and set of modes) of enquiry that have much in common with, and cannot always be clearly distinguished from, other social-research activity. Having conducted hundreds of interviews in the course of my working life, having been interviewed scores of times more, and having reviewed literature on interviews, I am not convinced there is a clear, categorical and relevant distinction to be made between journalistic interviewing, on the one hand, and ethnographic or sociological approaches, on the other. (My experience crosses all these categories of enquiry.) On the contrary, journalism gives rise to a wide variety of ‘conversations’ and expected outcomes: even the relatively narrow category of the ‘news interview’ contains multitudes (Fairclough, 1995; Greatbatch, 1998; Franklin et al., 2005). As one moves away from hard news and broadcast techniques in the direction of features, profiles and long-form journalism, efforts at sharp definition grow ever-more futile, and terms from the academy such as ‘semi-structured’ and ‘open-
ended’ describe a great deal of journalistic practice. Similarly, it’s not clear to me that there is a useful methodological distinction to be made between the researcher’s ‘case study’ and the reporter’s ‘profile’. As social researcher Robert E. Stake writes: ‘As a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used’ (quoted in Johansson, 2003: 2). As with interviewing, it is the genre of the finished publication rather than parsing of the methodology per se that ultimately categorises the practice.

Whereas case studies are often used to generate comparative knowledge, that was not the main goal of my own work. The case studies in my research on foundation-funded journalism, taken together with the cited critical literature, were rather intended to begin to clear some of the ‘benevolent fog’ (Edmonds, 2002) that surrounds liberal foundations in particular. In 2016, as Chuck Feeney’s Atlantic Philanthropies spends the last of the billions of dollars it has showered upon Ireland, some of the Irish NGO sector has begun to show a willingness to consider critically the strings that were attached to that funding over the years and the effects it had on practice in the community and voluntary sector (McCrea, 2016). The education and media sectors have not, however, shown a similar willingness, and ‘Foundation-Funded Journalism’ remains the only critical account, with both inside information and a theoretically

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7 John Hartley’s brilliant deconstruction (1982) of the performative structure of the standard British TV news interview has probably left a lasting but mistaken impression among non-journalists that there are uniform rules for journalistic interviewing. Despite the cliché of ‘hard questions’, more recent literature (Adams and Hicks, 2001; Rudin and Ilbotson, 2013; Harcup, 2015) confirms that journalistic interviewing is rarely adversarial and hugely plural and context-specific in its techniques, like, indeed, social-science interviewing (Roulston et al., 2003). There is further critical reflection on interviewing in chapter 3.7 of this thesis.

8 One of the standard journalism-practice textbooks even defines ‘profile’ as ‘a study of a personality… place, organisation, religion, etc’ (my emphasis), though the definition also complicates matters by using the rather less social-scientific word ‘portrait’ (Randall, 2000: 195). Meanwhile, the social-scientific literature on case studies addresses their constructed, contingent nature (Ó Riain, 2009), issues of selection bias (Mahoney and Terrie, 2009) and, despite any of that, their profound utility for ‘descriptions of the social world’ (Byrne, 2009: 3) in ways that are familiar to any scholar of journalism.
informed perspective, of what befell Ireland’s promising but ill-fated Centre for Public Inquiry.⁹

‘Foundation-Funded Journalism’ was originally a conference paper, presented in various forms at ‘journalism in crisis’ gatherings that proliferated internationally after 2008. In contrast, chapter 2.2, ‘The Strange Death of a Liberal Newspaper’, was written and published in 2006 before talk of crisis had become deafening, and was essentially an argument that a venerable journalistic establishment, the *Irish Times*, was in fact in a state of crisis of which it seemed barely cognisant. This crisis was in part the one that was looming for other papers in its market segment internationally: of falling circulation, advertising migrating to digital, and over-dependence on property- and recruitment-based revenue. But the main focus of the article was the question of whether the newspaper might be suffering a crisis of identity, in a period of Irish history when the ‘liberal agenda’ of which it had been a focus for nearly a half-century no longer felt so urgent, and when its largely middle-class and wealthy readership was enjoying unprecedented prosperity.

The commission from the editor of *The Dubliner* was to address the question of whether the *Irish Times* had moved to the right politically, especially under the editorship, since late 2002, of Geraldine Kennedy. The question somewhat discomfited me both because of its reductiveness – newspapers have politics, of course, and those politics can change, but they are complex institutions and the *Irish Times* aspires to a ‘newspaper of record’ neutrality – and because I myself had, some years earlier, been publically utilised as evidence of such a rightward tendency when my column in the paper was

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⁹ The only other significant account (O’Clery, 2007) is in the context of an uncritical authorised biography of Irish-American billionaire Feeney.
discontinued (The Phoenix, 2003). The format of an article, even a long one, in a glossy magazine did not lend itself to the sort of large-scale content-analysis project that might begin to put some hard evidence on the proposition that the newspaper’s politics had moved – so in the absence of such evidence, and given my concerns about the question and the dangers of appearing to answer it myself, I chose to pursue the assignment as an interview-based, issue-specific institutional profile, wherein I facilitated other appropriately qualified people to offer their views. Using my contacts from many years as a staff journalist at the paper and talking to many journalists and others inside and outside the Irish Times, I amassed – largely through the sheer volume of interview subjects – a substantial, polyvocal and multifaceted consideration of the paper’s status and direction that I hoped was minimally tainted by what might be regarded as my own biases on the subject.

The key task, arguably, was to make explicit to the magazine’s readership the fact of a newspaper’s politics, to cast doubts on ideas of neutrality, with an understanding of the social context and also the contingencies of personnel that might affect the question. And within that task was a further one: tying the evolution of the newspaper’s politics tightly to the interests of the class it represents, which meant untangling the typically Irish knot that conflates social liberalism (challenging the power of the Catholic Church) with economic radicalism (challenging the power of the bourgeoisie). The Irish Times was and is a particularly interesting institution to critique in this way, not only because of its history as a voice of Protestant unionism in Ireland, but also because of

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10 I authored a weekly radio-review column in the newspaper between 1995 and 2003, continuing to supply it on a freelance basis for more than a year after taking amicable voluntary redundancy from the paper’s staff, where I served from 1990 to 2002.
its ownership structure, which sees it controlled, ultimately, by a trust rather than by a rich proprietor.

The extent to which non-ownership-related networks and interests appear to affect the behaviour of journalists in a newspaper such as the Irish Times was the subject of research that I had pursued for years without bringing it to the point of publication. Some of this research ultimately found its place in my testimony to a high-profile parliamentary committee inquiring into the banking crisis – the crisis that had brought the Irish economy to its knees in 2008 and thereafter. The committee had decided to hold some days’ hearings on the role of the media as part of its ‘context’ investigations; in what was, for me, a rare foray into ‘neutral expertise’ in the service of the state, I was one of two academic experts invited to offer my views, to be followed by several newspaper editors and managers. I was before the committee for two hours; chapter 2.3 is a slightly longer and referenced version of my 15-minute introduction, submitted in precisely this form to the committee in advance of my appearance and published on its website. This is, in effect, a short research paper based upon mixed methods (Greene, 2007): I drew, of course, on extant data and academic literature on the subject, but also upon interviews I had conducted in 2006, at the height of the financial bubble, for the article that is now chapter 2.2. And I offered these in the context of original theoretical and historical insights about how changes in the physical composition of newspapers in the late 20th and early 21st century – the rise of the lifestyle, recruitment and property supplements, most relevantly – had impacted on the space for journalistic ‘professionalism’ within their pages, and sent messages about interests and priorities within their institutions, a way for capital to propose ideological discipline to the newspaper’s labour. In sum, I suggested that the inscription of neoliberal values on the
appearance of newspapers was both a metaphor for and an instrument of changes that were taking place within them.

My further suggestion that there was arguably more a congruence than a conflict of interests between newspapers and the financial/property interests that advertised so heavily in them was the key theme of the testimony, but I believe this research also added to the literature (Davies, 2008; McChesney and Nichols, 2011) that has attempted to map and understand the problematic corporate direction of much journalism prior to the outbreak of full-blown crisis (partly preceding and independent of online factors), not only underlining the tangible physical dimension to that direction, but also suggesting a mechanism by which such changes were reinforced in newspaper practice.

Chapter 2.4 is a co-authored content-analysis study of Irish newspaper coverage of the anti-war movement in late 2002 and early 2003. With the help of a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, my co-authors and I were able to produce a body of data of unusual breadth and depth about how a social movement was treated in the press. That data has, thus far, yielded two articles (one not yet accepted for publication), but in keeping with the ambitions of the funders, there was also an initial period of consultation with activists in which the authors sought feedback and direction from those involved in anti-war activities about how the research could be made relevant and useful to their work. Although that public process is not directly reflected in the chapter, which conforms to the model of a peer-reviewed academic publication, the wider context of the study highlights another interdisciplinary construct, that of the ‘scholar-activist’. Three of the five authors of this paper are regularly and visibly involved in activist groups beyond the academy, and have a reflexive interest in studying how activists are portrayed in media. Colin Coulter and I, the main authors
among the five on this study, have also worked together within anti-war and social-justice campaigns.

There is a rich tradition of scholarship on media framing of protest movements (e.g. in Britain, Halloran et al., 1970; in the US, Gitlin, 1980; in Ireland, Power et al., 2015) but this particular paper examines it from an angle that is peculiarly both Irish and transnational: how anti-war protest, especially as it related to the US military’s use of Shannon Airport, was constructed as a potential danger to the Irish economy because of the Republic’s important economic ties with US capital. The prospect of economic damage being caused by protest per se assumes that those economic ties are reliant on untroubled political friendship. In a national media culture that has been loath to discuss critically or to acknowledge Ireland’s position as a tax haven for transnational corporations, such assumptions were in fact commonplace, as this paper shows. This capacity to ignore the obvious – that US companies were in Ireland for their profits and didn’t really care how their country’s foreign policy was viewed here – was sustained for one of the reasons set out in previous chapters: journalists’ deference to powerful sources, some of whom decided to pursue the ‘economic consequences’ argument in the run-up to the war, facilitated in the press with few opposing voices.

The final three chapters in Part 2 move away from direct engagement with media institutions as their primary concern. The institutions under examination in chapters 2.5 and 2.6 – the European Union’s fisheries regime and the state’s immigration apparatus – are more formally coercive in their pursuit and maintenance of social power, of course, than the newspapers and philanthropic foundations that are scrutinised in earlier chapters. However, in these works I deal rather with those aspects of their hegemony that are pursued without obvious coercion. Indeed, in my study of the fishing industry,
‘Where Will They Get the Fish?’, part of the argument is that the regulations, the quotas, and their enforcement are something of a facade, behind which the real business of multinational companies profiting from ecologically unsustainable fishing practices is permitted to continue virtually unabated. This is captured in the article’s opening vignette, which at first glance appears to describe an instance of state power being used against such practices: a Spanish ship’s captain, working for a large company, is being prosecuted in a Kerry courtroom for illegal fishing. But the scene is quickly revealed to be one of routine and amiable complicity, where a relatively trivial sum of money changes hands in the name of ‘bail’ and the offence is unlikely to be heard of again.

That courtroom scene was something of a serendipitous gift of the sort journalists treasure, when an (anonymous) interviewee tipped me off that this bail hearing was due to take place during my time in Kerry. The research for the article as a whole was, however, a more dogged affair, involving days in libraries and many additional hours of online study, in order to understand and explain a set of practices about which I had little prior knowledge – just a healthy appetite for eating fish, diminished by what I learned over the months of investigation and writing. Although fundamentally a relatively conventional work of long-form journalism, this article is in fact less reliant on interviews for its main information and insights than, for example, chapter 2.1, an academic journal article.

Chapter 2.6, ‘Barrier Methods’, first appeared in the same quarterly literary journal as 2.5 (and chapter 3.6, ‘Gaza Diary’), Dublin Review. Unlike the previous chapter, which emerged in consultation with the journal’s editor based upon a general sense that people were curious and uninformed about fishing, ‘Barrier Methods’ was written in response to a specific set of witnessed detentions of African-looking passengers on the Belfast to
Dublin train. Those detentions, while not really covered in the press, were the subject of some published letters to the editor of the *Irish Times*. I went out, in effect, with a traditional news-features assignment: to figure out what was really happening, and why.

The results of this investigation were less than fully satisfying, not least due to the opacity of the institutions charged with enforcing immigration controls in Ireland. One of them, the Garda Síochána\(^{11}\), is notoriously secretive and not subject to freedom-of-information provisions. Another, the department of justice, is also notoriously secretive but, at least in theory, more accountable to the public. In the interests of transparency, and to draw attention to the failings of the allegedly transparent state information regime, I decided to make the largely unsuccessful effort to squeeze answers from these institutions an explicit thread in my storytelling. The shortage of information from those sources also forced me to focus as much upon the political uses of the immigration issue – the discourse, in effect – as upon the mechanics of policy implementation in Dundalk’s train station.

The difficulty I faced in researching and writing my second book, *The Frontman*, was a surfeit of information rather than a shortage. To be sure, many of the financial arrangements that surround U2 and Bono were and remain opaque. But the research task of the book was to analyse and synthesise the enormous existing public record of Bono’s life as an artist, activist, investor and celebrity humanitarian: I must have read millions of words, including many important previous critiques that had not received much exposure (*Magubane, 2008; Yrjölä, 2009; Farrell, 2012*). My task as a writer was to produce a document that met the requirements of the publisher, Verso, for a polemical ‘take-down’ while respecting my own ethical boundaries and – not

\(^{11}\) Literally, ‘guardian of the peace’, the main police service in the Republic of Ireland.
incidentally – the limits suggested by defamation law in Ireland and Britain. In the end, there was nothing left out of the book that I considered important, and my desire to give Bono credit where it was his due in several passages was respected by the editors. The book, despite what some readers assumed, was never motivated by personal animus toward its subject, and by the time I was writing the final sections I was far more preoccupied with the larger structures of philanthro-capitalism in Africa than I was with the peculiar persona of one musician. Those sections broke new ground in locating Bono’s work within the highly problematic Gates Foundation agenda for Africa – one that was at last more fully researched in another book from Verso (McGoey, 2015) and also by the British development organisation Global Justice Now (Curtis, 2016). The fact that Verso sold translation rights to The Frontman to publishers in Mexico (for the Spanish-speaking world) and in Italy gave me the opportunity to update the book in 2013 with a critique published online (Browne, 2013) of a new Bono TED talk that falsely claimed imminent victory in the fight against poverty – a useful epilogue in the two translated editions.

If the works in Part 2, and The Frontman in particular, were designed to sharpen readers’ understanding of the conflicts that lie hidden beneath various allegedly humanitarian and liberal discourses, then those in Part 3, ‘Popular Resistance’, largely concern themselves with people who have taken up the fight. Having grown up in the 1970s in a working-class New Jersey community, my enthusiasm for Bruce Springsteen is a passion at least as deep as any intellectual commitment, but chapter 3.1 is less an expression of that cultural affiliation than an attempt to marry it to a rigorous political understanding. My writings on Springsteen go back a further decade in various publications, including the Irish Times and Sunday Times, but the pieces gathered here (and several more besides) all appeared on the US political website CounterPunch,
edited by Irish-American journalist Alexander Cockburn, alongside Jeffrey St Clair. I periodically wrote about Bono over the same period for that website – the existence, but not the content, of *The Frontman* is owed to those articles – but while the writings about the Irishman were teasingly critical, those about the American singer were mostly earnestly appreciative. Partly they were aimed at convincing Cockburn and St Clair, both sceptical of Springsteen’s artistic and political merits. Such scepticism is widely shared, of course, about the capacity of mainstream cultural figures to do work that not only sheds critical light on the societies in which they are embedded, but also helps express and mobilise a politics of resistance. Springsteen, it seems to me, may have harboured such doubts himself, and this chapter’s series of explorations of his late-career output traces an intriguing arc that saw him take direct and explicit inspiration from an earlier generation of political artists – notably Pete Seeger – and then emerge for the first time with anthemic songs of leftist political import. Simon During notes rather acerbically that Springsteen’s post-9/11 politics have been relatively neglected in cultural studies, which have tended instead to celebrate the ‘transgressions’ of a market-oriented artist such as Madonna, and the writings here partly address that gap (*During*, 2007: 16).  

This artist’s arc has also not always been appreciated or understood in media and fan cultures, and the work in the chapter occasionally pauses to note the shortcomings there; but these articles are, for the most part, carefully considered and researched reviews of an artist’s work, in a period when that artist was, first, preoccupied with boundaries, and then determined to cross them. This is a musician who is often stereotyped as embodying near-static hyperlocality, the world of his songs mapped along New Jersey’s Highway 9; as an earlier critic wrote: ‘his commitment to

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12 Since the time when my articles were written, the gap has been somewhat filled by many of the chapters collected in a useful volume of critical research on Springsteen (*Womack et al.*, 2012).
the local and the image prevents him from engaging in larger issues’ (Grossberg, 1988: 134); Heylin (2014) similarly finds the young singer trapped within narrow boundaries of political possibility. However, this chapter hears Springsteen sounding a very-much-larger resistance call with musical notes he found in a wide-ranging transcultural journey of exploration.

As the last section of the chapter, on what I call Springsteen’s ‘Irish wake’, makes clear, one stopping point on that journey was certainly Ireland. Chapter 3.2, a document study on the Leeds-based Northern Star newspaper, examines how a 19th-century showman-activist, Feargus O’Connor, deployed Irish cultural forms in a similar effort to shake political consciousness. O’Connor, however, used Ireland not for some vague nostalgic sense of rebel authenticity, but because he was addressing English working-class readers in the midst of the greatest crisis in the history of his native land, the Famine, when victims of that disaster were washing onto British shores. This study, based almost exclusively in the newspaper itself and other contemporary documents, finds O’Connor to be both brilliant and erratic, brave and foolhardy; and however history may yet judge Bruce Springsteen, there can be little doubt at this distance that Feargus O’Connor failed on a political and personal level, with the collapse of Chartism and of his own sanity and health. Nonetheless, he won the (conflicted) admiration of no less than Friedrich Engels, and his effort to join British radicalism with the most insurrectionary nationalist tendencies in Irish politics would find echoes down through the years – not least in 2016, when the two most senior figures in the British Labour party, Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, have a history of solidarity with militant Irish republicanism. The presence of such a prominent Irish voice as O’Connor’s on the British left during the Famine did not produce the transnational political revolution that he sought on both sides of the Irish Sea, but it may have helped keep some of the most
chauvinist tendencies of the English labour movement at bay, then and in the years to come.

The Leitrim and New York republican socialist Jim Gralton was, if anything, a more isolated figure of failure on the Irish and transnational left. However, whereas chapters 3.1 and 3.2 consist of my own research on and reflections about Springsteen and O’Connor in their contemporary contexts, this chapter 3.3 on Gralton is less about the man himself than about the cultural and class politics of reviving and retelling his 20th-century story in 21st-century Ireland. The retellings, focusing on his ill-fated community dance hall, come in two very different forms, both produced by artists of considerable interest from the perspective of this thesis. Film director Ken Loach and his frequent collaborator, writer Paul Laverty, are figures of international importance whose treatment of historical subjects have been subject to some, albeit insufficient, scholarly scrutiny (Archibald et al., 2007; English, 2006). The film-makers’ romantically tinged social-realist approach to telling the Gralton story in Jimmy’s Hall (Loach, 2014) stands in stark aesthetic contrast to the full-on Brechtian theatricality of Benbo Productions’ Jimmy Gralton’s Dancehall, the brainchild of the more neglected Irish artist-activists Sorcha Fox and Donal O’Kelly. While there are overlaps and coincidences in the subject matter – and Fox herself acted prominently in the film – the differences between the approaches go beyond those of medium and aesthetic. The stage-play used Gralton’s story to explore the intersections between different forms of oppression and resistance, in the 1930s and in the present day – chaotically celebrating the eventual defeat of the stiff-backed Catholic Church at the feet of a roomful of dancers, but reminding us, with the participation of local African asylum-seekers, that Gralton was not Ireland’s last deportee. The film, in contrast, is more orthodoxly Marxist, turning the Church into a patsy for the bourgeoisie, whose ultimate interest is
in economic control over local people, and who revere the church only insofar as it will help them maintain that dominance. My two articles, more political accounts of the two works than reviews, suggest that it is not necessary to choose between these divergent approaches to both recounting and mobilising resistance – that the dialectic, and articulation, of a radical intersectionality and a more traditional materialist Marxism yields a synthesis that is more revealing about the Ireland of the 1930s, and 2010s, than either of the two works seen alone.

The Gralton chapter is the last of a series of chapters that primarily analyse cultural ‘texts’, albeit texts considered as part of wider processes in their context and reception. One of those texts, the theatrical production *Jimmy Gralton’s Dancehall*, was also very much an event as well as a text, and its creators Sorcha Fox and Donal O’Kelly were and are part of an activist milieu in Ireland that is at the centre of the next three chapters, where the approach turns more reportorial, with elements of what the ethnographer would call ‘participant observation’.\(^\text{13}\) The small activist milieu contains many overlapping activisms: Fox and O’Kelly themselves return in chapter 3.5, among the participants in a cultural ‘truthfest’ to bring Irish solidarity to the family of Wikileaks whistleblower Chelsea Manning in Wales. They were joined in Pembrokeshire by Ciaron O’Reilly, one of the Pitstop Ploughshares defendants whose story is told in chapter 3.4, comprising extracts from my first book, *Hammered by the Irish*. Fintan Lane, the partner of one O’Reilly’s fellow defendants during most of the time covered by the book, led the trip to Gaza that is recounted in chapter 3.6. I myself am the ultimate overlapper, personally involved and active in the events described in all three of these chapters. My transparency about my involvement, and that of many

\(^{13}\) Foley (2013), citing the great Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński, makes a strong case for the fundamental similarity between such reporting and ethnographic fieldwork.
friends, takes various forms. For *Hammered by the Irish*, I was the only journalist who closely followed the trials and campaigning of the ‘Shannon Five’ direct-action defendants from 2003 to 2006, and the book reflects my intimate knowledge of the case: I chose to write a preface in the first person (not excerpted here) that highlighted my own emotional investment in the Pitstop Ploughshares (the preferred name for the group) as political actors and friends at the time of their historic acquittal; in the rest of the book I rendered myself completely absent as a character. The other two pieces, chapters 3.5 and 3.6, take a diaristic approach in which the ‘I’ is a constant presence.

Although these pieces are all at least partly celebratory, they deal too with uncertainty about how and even where activists should ‘act’, especially when the issues they confront are not obviously part of their day-to-day lived experience. In chapter 3.4, they act in Ireland to stop an imminent war in Iraq; in 3.5, they travel to Wales to perform songs and stories for the family of Chelsea Manning, a political prisoner in Kansas; in 3.6, they go to Gaza to ‘forge links with civil society’ but are reminded of the unbridgeable gap between those who merely visit and those who remain behind. I attempt to theorise such journeys and encounters in chapter 1.3.

The middle chapters in Part 3 are almost entirely empirical. Chapter 3.5, for example, reports upon and assesses the effects of at least three journeys: the literal journey of a group of Irish activists and musicians over a winter sea to Wales; the personal journey of Chelsea Manning from the teenage Bradley who struggled through early adolescence in Pembrokeshire to the woman enduring torture in US military prisons; and the political journey of her extended Welsh family from silence to pride about the transgender whistleblower who lived among them. It also describes how such a family, largely working-class and conservative, copes with the sudden arrival of a dozen leftist
strangers bearing guitars and solidarity. (The immediate answer has something to do with hospitality, or more specifically food preparation.)

Hospitality is vital to the transcultural journey. It was again the keynote of an encounter that was cut from the published version of ‘Gaza Diary’. It tells the story of an encounter in Cairo, two years on from the revolution that overthrew Hosni Mubarak, between our group of travelling Irish activists, en route to Gaza, and radical Egyptian campaigners still camped in the city. The meeting, as described diaristically in my writing, threw up surprising echoes of shared history and contemporary connection:

In Tahrir Square, many revolutionaries of the Arab Spring have been camped for anything between two months and two years, waiting to make something more happen to transform their country properly. We go west across the occupied, chaotic square, now closed to traffic by the rebels, to where there is a mural that namechecks, in roman script, ‘Falestin’. Here there’s a small, coherent camp, four dusty tents, surrounded by rope. A man waves us in. An English speaker, Amer, with smoke-stained teeth and an old woolly hat, emerges and tells us they want us to have breakfast with them. We said we’ve had breakfast, so they invite us for mere tea.

Amer talks, tells us about their two years since the revolution, about why they can’t leave now that they have seen their friends die there. Amer says he is a wanted man but police are afraid to go into the square….

One of his comrades – they are another four men, aged perhaps 30 to 55, and it’s one of the older men who speaks up – wants to know if we are Christians. Amer explains that the man is Christian himself. We are all atheists. We feel slightly self-conscious about that avowal of unbelief and one of us starts to explain carefully that we’ve had historic problems with religion in Ireland. ‘Yes, of course, like with Parnell,’ Amer interrupts. It turns out he is a lover of Joyce.

Quite a long time and a lot of tea passes before they ask us what we are doing here, are we tourists? (We really do look like tourists.) Our revelation that we are going to Palestine, to Gaza, sparks new enthusiasm. We are activists! Now all want to shake our hands. ‘Then you are our brothers.’

The keynote of all three of these works, these reportorial activist-ethnographies, is sounded by Pitstop Ploughshares defendant Nuin Dunlop. In courtroom testimony she said she damaged a US military plane out of a sense of responsibility – which she

14 From an unpublished first draft of ‘Gaza Diary’, 2013
defines as the privilege of her ‘ability to respond’, in contrast to the helplessness of many of those who would be on the receiving end of the coming war. But it’s one thing to recognise that ability to respond in oneself, and another thing entirely to work out exactly what response it enables.

Without overstating the case, it’s fair to say that these articles, and at some level all the writings here, are themselves part of my own ongoing attempt to answer the question of how I ‘respond’. In the case of the ‘Manning Truthfest’, I had a special sense of ‘responsibility’ to the courageous Chelsea Manning, since I had broken some stories based on the Wikileaks tranche of diplomatic cables. In every case, though, the act of writing is for me a sort of activism. It’s appropriate, then, that my final chapter, 3.7, is a reflexive exploration of a journalistic project that was designed as an intervention in the public debate about immigration in Ireland. Given the shadow of failure that looms over the accounts and analysis of resistance in Part 3, it is also appropriate that the chapter describes a project that ultimately failed to materialise.

That project was conceived with my journalist colleague and fellow immigrant, Chinedu Onyejelem, publisher and editor at the ‘multicultural newspaper’ Metro Eireann\textsuperscript{15}. He and I developed a proposal for a book and accompanying radio series in which immigrants in Ireland talked about their lives; we conducted and recorded a significant body of interviews in pursuit of the project, approached publishers and completed a sample chapter. For me, the politics of such an exploration of migrant stories were exciting; as one Irish geographer puts it: ‘Their allegiances are complex, transnational and, in terms of traditional Irish constructions of identity, profoundly

\textsuperscript{15} Founded in 2000 by Nigerian-born journalists Onyejelem and Abel Ugba, this tabloid continues to appear twice a month in 2016.
subversive’ (Mac Êinri, 2011: 8). The research paper included here as chapter 3.7 appeared in *Projecting Migration* (Grossman and O’Brien, 2007), a book and DVD of work by academics and practitioners about transcultural documentary practice, where it was accompanied by audio files; it locates our project within various ethnographic and sociological traditions, notably that of ‘life story’ as a mode of social research. It relates the project to the contemporary conditions of journalism for, of and about about migrants in Ireland, and reflects upon how the project intersected with and sought to transcend those conditions. It is among my most theoretically informed and thorny works, and in some sense it records my own effort to persuade myself of the validity of a project that was proving time-consuming and problematic to sell as a book. (Our ambition was for a publisher that would bring a potentially large audience.) Ultimately, as the chapter does not record, we were convinced of the project’s intellectual coherence but, given the obstacles, not of its practicality, nor indeed of its political utility. In short, would a series of essentially random stories of transcultural encounters really reveal some new well of sympathy with and for immigrants among the ‘native’ Irish population? Although in principle I stand, like Nick Couldry, for the idea that in cultural research, ‘[w]hat matters is not the achievement of some unified voice that elides difference, but the multiplication of voices’ (2000: 37), I feared that such a project, in published form, might ultimately be indistinguishable from liberal ‘celebrations of diversity’, with all their elisions, evasions, exploitations and irrelevance to any systematic confrontation with racism and its structural roots – precisely the too-easy embrace of cosmopolitanism that part of this research was dedicating to critiquing.

To end the thesis with a chapter that contains just beneath its surface a tale of frustration and incompletion might seem like tempting fate. My own journey around and across disciplines, to and through literal and figurative borderlands, is wandering, sometimes
confusing, and by no means finished. Such coherence as I have found for some of its emanations over the last decade is a retrospective mapping. I continue to travel in uncharted territory, and have been known to get lost.
In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (Anzaldúa, 1987: iii).

Gloria Anzaldúa’s vivid and concrete 1980s evocation (and eroticisation) of la frontera, in poetry and prose, was an important exploration of the interchanges taking place at the porous boundaries of sexual, class and ethnic identity formation, the realm of the mestiza. The frontier, physical and emotional, was at least as much a site of contact as of separation. When, soon after, Mary Louise Pratt visited some of the same territory in her Edward-Said-influenced history of imperial travel writing and the complex responses of subjugated people, she summarised: ‘Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone’ (Pratt, 2007: 7).

The current chapter, to some extent a literature review for what follows, seeks to locate the idea of transcultural contact zones within a Gramscian theoretical framework – one that informs and is informed by my own professional and political practice. It has been said that Gramscianism’s ‘intertwining of theory and practice has produced... a theory that is too political and partisan to be credible, and a politics that is too theoretical to be popular and effective’ (Harris, 1992: 156). However, the intellectual excitement of the Gramscian tradition is as much a matter of process as of ‘product’. As Joseph A. Buttlieg observes, Gramsci’s writings invite us ‘to become involved in an active – one could even say participatory – encounter with ideas and lines of thinking which, in the case of the Prison Notebooks, remain always in a fluid process of elaboration,
reformulation, revision, amplification’ (in Santucci, 2010: 11). What follows in this chapter is a necessarily fluid and tentative attempt to twist a Gramscian thread and other ideas about culture, politics and power into a new rope strong enough to support the chapters that comprise the balance of this thesis. I take heart from the Gramscian idea that ‘emancipatory thought is… necessarily difficult and provisional, if it is to count as “critical” at all’ (Farrands and Worth, 2005: 45).

With its accounts and instantiations of radical political activism set alongside analyses of hegemonic state and civil-society institutions, this thesis reflects ‘the need for practical and critical knowledge to be grounded in a common project’ (Farrands and Worth, 2005: 58). ‘Critical theory’, Natalie Fenton writes in a recent Gramsci-inflected article, must ‘combine social theory, empirical research and radical politics in theory and in practice…. It should be able to reach outside of disciplinary borders and connect with the world outside including social movements and political organizations’ (2016: 3). This combining, outlined in chapter 1.2, constitutes a methodological as well as a theoretical orientation, embedded in a consistent attentiveness to the specificities of the conjuncture – ‘the complex set of power relations obtaining at a particular historical moment’ (Gilbert, 2008: 52–53).

This chapter will do more than simply assert that my work draws upon and embodies, broadly speaking, some aspects of Gramscian critical theory. I will, with three acts of location, elaborate a theoretical map for the work that follows, incorporating but not confined to Gramscian guidance. Firstly, I will locate the thesis’s view of culture as both deeply embedded in politics and resistant to the limits of national boundaries and essentialisms. Secondly, I will locate its understanding of hegemony both as an account of bourgeois power and a programme for a praxis of popular resistance. Finally I will
seek to describe and develop what I hope is a politically productive set of spatial metaphors for locating a set of events and encounters in the hegemonic borderlands, with the help of concepts including the Deleuzian ‘line of flight’, as part of my own effort ‘to alter the terrain of power’ (Fenton, 2016: 4).

**Trans/Culture**

Had the article appeared in a different sort of publication, the section heading above might have been half-punningly attached to chapter 3.5, which follows the journey of a group of Irish artists to give political support to the Welsh family of American transwoman Chelsea Manning. That story sees ‘identities’ both affirmed – the Welsh singing late into the night, the Irish donning shamrocked novelty items – and complexified, starting with the shifting gender pronouns for the soldier who is its absent centre. It is no exaggeration to say that every work in Part 3 contains and analyses such transcultural, hybridised figures and encounters – and indeed all were written in anticipation of transnational readerships – but the somewhat more domestic concerns that dominate Part 2 are also consistently subjected to scrutiny that is laden with transcultural context. For example, the structure of *The Frontman* materialises an analysis of the Irish/global figure of Bono not in chronological terms but in a series of expanding geographic rings: the book’s three sections are called ‘Ireland’, ‘Africa’ and ‘The World’.

So emphatic, indeed, is this emphasis that it seems to me the work can be classed as ‘cultural studies’ only with the addition of the prefix ‘trans’. In Part 2, especially, I join the ‘long tradition in critical media studies’ of transdisciplinary, transcultural political economy, enabling me ‘to integrate institutional and cultural analyses’ (Chakravartty and Zhao, 2008: 24). The chapters in Part 3, then, move from political economy to up-
close studies of transculturation, that is, ‘how an unequal encounter between cultures – colonial and colonized, imperial and globalized – creates new social and cultural forms, styles, or practices’ (Chakravartty and Zhao, 2008: 26). Mohammad Antar’s Gaza rapping (chapter 3.6) and Feargus O’Connor’s Leeds-Irish doggerel (chapter 3.2) are two of the most obvious examples.¹⁶

The emphasis on ‘trans’ ensures that the word ‘culture’ is not, here, merely a bland, PC synonym for the static, essentialist term ‘race’ (Titley, 2004; Mulhern, 2009). A transcultural approach ‘requires the negotiation of complex, uneven and disparate cultural flows and processes’, and an insistence on ‘culture as a space of contestation’ where meaning ‘is disputed and in flux’ (Titley, 2004: 10). If, however, part of the work of ‘trans’ is to signify fluidity (Van Bouwel and Carpentier, 2012), it also rejects ‘the naive idea that cultural flow is free and unconstrained, as if our cultural investments could ever be innocent of the bitter history of conflicts about who belongs and where’ (Couldry, 2000: 106).

Transcultural approaches to borderlands and liminality have obviously yielded rich insights in literary and cultural studies. Exemplary evidence of the theoretical and methodological usefulness of transcultural political economy, far beyond a politically correct nomenclature toward a capacity to frame global processes, is found in Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s remarkable book *Friction* (2005). It follows environmental

¹⁶ ‘Scholars often blur the distinction between transnationalism and transculturalism,’ a recent study aptly notes, choosing either term based upon ‘their disciplinary background and theoretical position rather than because of the conceptual utility of the wording’ (Richter and Nollert, 2014: 459), with the former term coming from migration/diaspora studies and the latter linked to sociology and pedagogy. While I can’t police how my sources use the terms, in my own usage I have largely followed these authors, who ‘associate *transnationalism* with the spatial and... material aspects of places, regions and nation-states connected by social practice, and *transculturalism* with the cultural aspects of belonging, emotions and association’ (Richter and Nollert, 2014: 459). Moreover, and especially in postcolonial studies, transnationalism is often a dimension of the transcultural (Bhabha, 2012).
disputes in a region of Indonesian rainforest through their various transnational corporate and political articulations and implications, ‘an ethnography of global connection’ (Tsing, 2005: ix), with a toolkit that is, like my own, ‘variously ethnographic, journalistic, and archival’ (Tsing, 2005: x). I will return later to how Tsing theorises a global politics that is sensitive to local contingency and the ‘friction’ of transcultural encounters. For now, one of Tsing’s lessons is an obvious if difficult one for anyone confronting those with political and economic power: ‘our’ politics must be transcultural and transnational because ‘theirs’ is. For this Irish thesis, the contexts are both US economic and political empire and, to a lesser extent, the European Union, which has led an ‘intensified neo-liberal restructuring of the European social relations of production driven by transnational class fractions’ (Bieler et al., 2006: 3).

European and global capital is driven, in part, by a process of deterritorialisation. ‘Capitalism’s command is utterly simple: connect deterritorialized flows of labor and capital and extract a surplus from that connection’ (Smith, 2008). While chapters in Part 2 of this thesis focus on discursive and material flows of capital, in Part 3 the attention is often on ‘labour’, which is to say human migrants and others at the dirty end of the flow. The nature and purpose of such attention, on people who in addition to their material burdens are often ‘objects of media stories, ethnographic research, touristic gazes and state, military or aid organization attention’ should be ‘to produce academic knowledge and testimony across political and cultural borders which are not complicit with these gazes, stories and attentions’ (During, 2007: 25).

Achieving this goal of attention without complicity is a delicate matter, and transcultural practice at its best often achieves this with a studied respect for the agency and subject position of the putative object (Grossman and O’Brien, 2007). This respect
is writ large, in political terms, by this century’s most influential theorists of the flows of deterritorialised ‘empire’ and labour, who are famously optimistic about such people’s capacity to constitute themselves as a collective revolutionary subject. As Hardt and Negri write:

Through circulation the multitude reappropriates space…. These movements often cost terrible suffering, but there is also in them a desire of liberation that is not satiated except by reappropriating new spaces, around which are constructed new freedoms. Everywhere these movements arrive, and all along their paths they determine new forms of life and cooperation (2001: 397).

It is important to emphasise that my ultimate focus is the politics and potentiality of the collective subject rather than the cultural freedom and agency of individuals; I am wary, in short, of ‘a “cultural” dissolution of politics’ (Mulhern, 2000: xix): culture is, in Part 3 of my thesis, less a site of contestation and more a means of resistance. There is already a vast literature about cultural studies’ history of populism, its elevation of symbolic hints of resistance – the ‘privileging of identity as the site and stake of social antagonism’ (Mulhern, 2000: 169). As Jeremy Gilbert writes of the early cultural-studies enthusiasts who celebrated ‘resistance’ at every turn:

[Those] who believed that an attack on the so-called traditional nuclear family, or the racist hierarchies of Western culture, was therefore also an attack on capitalism as such (and vice-versa) have turned out to have been deeply mistaken.... Capitalism has shown that it can accommodate itself to the demands of women, non-white people, youth and so forth, by transforming its institutional and technological apparatuses but without altering its most basic patterns of exploitation (Gilbert, 2008: 31–32).

Terry Eagleton suggests sarcastically that, into the 21st century, postmodern cultural theory has continued to burst bravely through a door that had already been removed from its hinges: ‘assailing absolute truth, objectivity, timeless moral values, scientific inquiry and a belief in historical progress’ among various other already discredited notions (Eagleton, 2003: 17). ‘Only an intellectual who has overdosed on abstraction,’
he writes, ‘could be dim enough to imagine that whatever bends a norm is politically radical’ (2003: 15).

Even one of the most famous 1970s celebrants of the resistance inherent in punk culture, Dick Hebdige, later admitted ‘that he had underestimated the power of commercial culture to appropriate, and, indeed, to produce, counter-hegemonic styles’ (During, 2007: 429). One might add: it is not just the style of apparent resistance that can be absorbed, but also its seeming substance – one pertinent exemplar of such powerful appropriation being the punk-descended U2 singer, Bono, as described in chapter 2.7. Bono and the other human and institutional subjects in my work, on both sides of the proposed hegemonic divide, are not busily contesting the semiotic dominance of capital within the realm of, say, theatre or popular music – or at least that’s not how I’m describing them – rather, they are engaged in supporting or challenging capital’s material dominance in the world. Stuart Hall himself confessed to a ‘nagging doubt that the overwhelming textualization of cultural studies’ own discourses somehow constitutes power and politics as exclusively matters of language and textuality itself’ (Hall, 2007: 44). Or as the American left-wing magazine n+1 put it: ‘[L]earning to think strategically about symbolic forms doesn’t necessitate any particular substantive politics’ (cited in Mulhern, 2015: 74).

There is, nonetheless, a great deal to be said for learning to think strategically about symbolic forms. For all that it is easy to mock serial celebrations of the popular in cultural studies, the ‘(fetishistic?) attachments to the marginal, the abject, and to “resistance”’ (Bowman, 2003: 4), the insights of the field do make it more difficult for anyone who has been paying attention to carry out simplistic political-economy scholarship, whether in the field of media or beyond, that ‘reduces the problematic of
mass communications to the maneuvers whereby a transnational system imposes tastes and opinions on the subaltern classes’ (Garcia Canclini, 2005: 289). Those classes, we have been reminded, are not simply ‘subordinate, passive, and reflected’, but rather they, and we, experience power ‘as a disseminated social relation’ (Garcia Canclini, 2005: 289). I like to think that Garcia Canclini, perceptive scholar of Mexican migrants’ use of transcultural mediated products, would appreciate the power and play in the account of *African Big Brother* that ends chapter 2.7 of this thesis.

Attention to power, is, as a succession of sympathetic scholars agree, the central objective of the cultural-studies project at its best:

> [T]o make sense of the precise configurations of power which shape contemporary life…. It is this attempt to analyse conjunctures – complex configurations of power relationships – using whatever conceptual tools are necessary, which I think characterises the central project of cultural studies (Gilbert, 2008: 7).

Nick Couldry (2000) agrees that the discipline of cultural studies coalesces not around method – by any means necessary, as it were, though he names empiricism and reflexivity as hallmarks of cultural studies done properly – but around power. But naming power as our subject can sometimes seem like a rhetorical abstraction; in most cultural studies, and in my work, the form taken by power and resistance that is amenable to our attention is, by and large, communication. ‘Communication is necessarily partial, filled with holes, inseparable from power and hierarchy, reliant on exclusion,’ Jodi Dean (2012: 121) writes. ‘Communicative capitalism mobilizes these parts and holes, these fragments in motion, filling them in with images and feelings and bits of enjoyment’ (Dean, 2012: 121). The metaphor is dizzying and not terribly hopeful – unless we consider the likelihood that capital can’t possibly fill all those holes on its
own. The gaps are transient, transitory, transitive, potentially transformative. Much of this thesis examines how both power and resistance try to fill them.

Culture, according to Thomas Docherty, ‘is not a state of affairs’ (2003: 222). It is events, encounters, fragments in motion. In the course of a book-length argument for the need to historicise cultural studies, Michael Pickering reflects upon Raymond Williams’ sociology of culture, and notes that its ‘real cutting edge is its application to liminal forms of experience, as a category of pre-emergence referring to developing forms of change that are not, at the stage which is addressed, realised as characteristic’ (1997: 45). It is not too much of a stretch, I think, to propose that it is at that cutting edge, near those thresholds across which history is emerging, where Gramsci comes into the picture.

**Hegemony and Praxis**

As Pickering explains, it was only when Williams got to grips with a Gramscian conception of hegemony that he was empowered to ‘address questions concerning challenge, disruption and change’ (Pickering, 1997: 47). Gramscian hegemony was a tool for such inquiry ‘because of its constitutive emphasis on forces of power. The appeal of this concept for Williams clearly lay in its compatibility with his emphasis on history as process as well as product’ (Pickering, 1997: 47). Contrary to various shorthands that are employed by many who cite Gramsci, Gramscian hegemony is indeed a process, not the description of a state of affairs; it refers to leadership, not (necessarily) dominance; it theorises class alignment, not technical governance; and the consent that it elicits from potentially opposing classes may be passive and/or grudging rather than active and engaged – hegemony is not synonymous with bourgeois
Most importantly, hegemony is less an account of class rule than a conceptual tool for overturning it in conditions where a sudden rupture, a decisive war of manoeuvre, is not possible, and a positional ‘war’ must be ‘conducted in a protracted way, across many different and varying fronts of struggle’ (Hall et al., 1996: 426).

Hegemony is a theory for a corresponding praxis: ‘War of position, in politics, is the concept of hegemony’ (Gramsci notebook 8, paragraph 52, cited in Thomas, 2009: 157).

Hegemony, writes Peter Thomas,

is a moment of rupture with the conceptuality of the bourgeois epoch…. It points to the possibility of breaking out... but it does not itself enact such a liberation; it remains prospective, tentative, exploratory. Rather, it is a “practico-indicative” or “practical” concept,… a provisional solution to the problems posed within it (2009: 134).

As Thomas explains, hegemony should be understood not simply as a concept to apply in analysing civil society but rather one that is intrinsically linked to Gramsci’s concept of the integral state, in which political and civil realms are dialectically linked: ‘Hegemony in civil society functions as the social basis of the dominant class’s political power in the state apparatus, which in turn reinforces its initiatives in civil society’ (Thomas, 2009: 137, 144). This feedback loop is important in this thesis, in which hegemonic instrumentality resides with, and moves among, a range of governmental and civil-society figures – fisheries inspectors and rock stars, priests and presidents, philanthropists and immigration officers. Gramsci writes of a celebrated liberal philosopher and political figure of his time: ‘Benedetto Croce, for example, is a kind of lay pope and an extremely efficient instrument of hegemony – even if at times he may

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17 As Gilbert notes: ‘[I]t doesn’t really matter if you agree with the discourse of neoliberalism or not, as long as the people running your company, school or government agree with it and you are not part of an organised movement against it’ (2008: 181).
find himself in disagreement with one government or another’ (Gramsci, 1971: 56).
Substitute the name of Bono, or indeed the Irish Times, for Croce’s and you have the working hypothesis of chapter 2.2 or 2.7 of this thesis. Famously conscientious public figures and newspapers loom large in his conception: in parliamentary regimes, Gramsci writes, ‘the “normal” exercise of hegemony… appears to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion’ (Gramsci, 1971: 80). But, again, we work to understand the construction of hegemony in order to turn the tables:

Gramsci was attempting to understand how it would be possible to introduce a dynamic element of progress into the really existing historical societies of his own time. He wanted to develop a technique of political work that will enable socialists, communists, and Marxists to effectively intervene into the struggles occurring in their societies and to provide leadership for movements that are attempting to resolve those real problems. In that sense, we can say that Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is today an open question (Thomas et al., 2014).

For Thomas there is no question, open or otherwise, of Gramsci confining the contestation of hegemony safely to civil society, in a critical-studies battle of the bands to see which is more counter-cultural – because, as noted, civil society in his conception is inseparable from the integral state. ‘[C]ivil society is not an uncompromised ‘pre-political’ realm that lies beyond, or comes before, the state. Rather, it is an ensemble of practices and relations dialectically interpellated by and integrated within the state’ (Thomas, 2009: 180). Therefore, Thomas writes:

Hegemony is a particular practice of consolidating social forces and condensing them into political power on a mass basis – the mode of production of the modern “political”. Gramsci leaves no doubt that the exercise of hegemony, initially elaborated within civil society, also impacts upon that other superstructural “level” of the integral state, “political society or State”…. A bid for “civil hegemony” has to progress towards “political hegemony” in order to maintain itself as itself (Thomas, 2009: 194).
Hegemony occurs in time, in history; it is contingent, dynamic and potentially messy and contradictory, even reversible, not mechanistic or closed. ‘[T]he class that… directs reproduction politically and ideologically… must allow spaces in which subaltern groups develop practices that are independent and not always functional for the system’ (Garcia Canclini, 2005: 198). In our period, the regime of neoliberal capitalism, of necessity, is not simply a system of repression and inequality, but one that ‘also provides new and often unintended possibilities for negotiation, incorporation, and contestation’ (Chakravartty and Zhao, 2008: 19). Hegemony is a moving equilibrium, a contest for those possibilities. As Clarke et al note:

[Hegemony] cannot be taken for granted – either by the state and the dominant classes, or, for that matter, by the analyst. The current use of the term, to suggest the unending and unproblematic exercise of class power by every ruling class, and its opposite – the permanent and finished incorporation of the subordinate class – is quite false to Gramsci’s usage…. Hegemony… has to be won, worked for, reproduced, sustained (2006: 30).

Hegemony is thus subject to alliances and articulations that can change, proposing a situation ‘precisely different from that of a pacified, homogeneous, ruling class’ (Hall, 1988: 170). The idea of hegemony thus presumes a potential for contestation, both material and ideological. Elites would have no need to wade – as they do in many of my publications – into the hazardous waters of egalitarian, liberatory and social-justice ideas were that not the case. Gramsci cites Marx to the effect ‘that a popular conviction often has the same energy as a material force’; in a would-be hegemonic ‘historical bloc… material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though… the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces’ (Gramsci, 1971: 377).

If hegemony is the contest, then the philosophy of praxis is the weapon: ‘the equality of, or equation between, “philosophy and politics”, thought and action, that is… a
philosophy of praxis’ (Gramsci, 1971: 356–357). The relation of theory and praxis is not mere ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’; it is making ideas affect practice, so that they intervene in history. As Gramsci writes:

If the problem of producing the identity of theory and praxis is posed, it is posed in this sense: to construct, on the basis of a determinate practice, a theory that, coinciding and identifying itself with the decisive elements of the same practice, may accelerate the historical process taking place, rendering practice more homogeneous, coherent, efficient in all of its elements, strengthening it to the maximum; or, given a certain theoretical position, to organise the indispensable practical element for setting it to work (Gramsci, 1971: 365).

It is the philosophy of praxis that helps clarify why Gramscian hegemony is not some neutral account of governance transferable between classes. Bourgeois hegemony may proceed through obscuring differences, on the pretences that ‘eradicating poverty’, ‘securing borders’, ‘protecting fish stocks’, ‘saving journalism’, ‘fighting terrorism’ (to take some examples from my work) are consensually agreeable public goods. A praxis for defeating it, on the contrary, ‘requires drawing new political frontiers and acknowledging that there cannot be a radical politics without the definition of an adversary. That is to say, it requires the acceptance of the ineradicability of antagonism’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: xvii), the necessary identifying of the battlefields in a war of position. Gramsci writes:

The philosophy of praxis does not aim at the peaceful resolution of existing contradictions in history and society but is rather the very theory of these contradictions. It is not the instrument of government of the dominant groups in order to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over the subaltern classes; it is the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths (1995: 395–396).

As Karen Buckley notes, the philosophy of praxis, as a way of approaching resistance, ‘re-orientates the point of focus to historical subjects of contestation and their modes of social relation’ to the established order (2013: 10.18). Buckley, whose own field of study is global political economy, also offers a useful elaboration: drawing upon Roland
Bleiker’s historical theorisation of ‘transversal dissent’ (Bleiker, 2000), Buckley insists upon ‘the transversal, rather than binary, nature of Gramscian hegemony’ (2013: 10.34). Bleiker writes:

If we are to gain an adequate understanding of contemporary dissent, and of global life in general, we must look beyond the lines that have been arbitrarily drawn into the sand of international politics… It is the steady breeze, the gusty bursts of energy, the transversal forms of agency, that are gradually transforming the lines and shapes of contemporary life (2000: 7).

If Bleiker’s prose tends toward the poetic, Buckley nonetheless makes a persuasive case that the concept of transversal hegemony in conjunction with a philosophy of praxis may help us better to describe and understand counter-hegemonic subjects. This is not complexification for its own sake, but rather praxis in action, a means to an end: ‘A transversal understanding of hegemony… draws attention to processes involved in its construction, maintenance and extension, and thus to inherent interactions, negotiations and interstices’ (Buckley, 2013: 10.22).

So we are back in the realm of ‘trans’, and of seeking interstices, little gaps, in order to fill them – wherever they may occur. Laclau and Mouffe suggest we seek them everywhere: ‘the constitution of a hegemonic left alternative can only come from a complex process of convergence and political construction, to which none of the hegemonic articulations constructed in any area of social reality can be of indifference’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 174). Attention to ‘any area of social reality’ is no small order – except, perhaps, to a journalist, for whom such promiscuity is commonplace.

Taken together, the injunctions from Laclau and Mouffe and from Buckley (both by way of Gramsci) are invitations – in theory and practice, in the objects of our study and in our role as political subjects – to cut across social, cultural and national boundaries, to disrupt familiar binaries, to re-examine and where possible to reshape the angles of
hegemonic conflict. In one sense, Gilbert writes, hegemony is really ‘the name for a particular capacity both to deterritorialise and to reterritorialise along specific axes, thus simultaneously defining and realising... a particular set of interests’ (Gilbert, 2013). In the normal course of hegemony, such capacity belongs to the powerful. That is the story of Part 2 of this thesis, where elites work to define their interests hegemonically in various fields of media and politics, social and economic life. Part 3 sees various people and institutions seek to seize that capacity, to reset the axes, in the interests of resistance.

One example of a materialisation, a praxis, of such an intellectual programme comes in the subject of, and the form of, a new edited collection on alliances between civil-society groups and migrants in various parts of the world. Its editors write:

The actions of solidarity, many of them developed under unfavourable circumstances, have been carried out in different manners as rejections of hegemonic migration politics. In this regard, we find it necessary to consider all those alliances and shaping of spaces of resistance which have enhanced a different way of understanding migration politics, produced within the civil society sphere…. [Ninety] years ago Gramsci was already reflecting upon the potential of such popular mobilisations and the power of alliance building in expanding a conflict and bringing about social and political transformation (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2016: 4).

Migration and crossing over, as social reality and as political metaphor, are central to the effort to put some shape on this potential, an effort to which I turn next.

**The ‘Line of Flight’**

Engels himself, in an effort to combat vulgar economic determinism among early Marxists, wrote in 1890 that ‘there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant — the historical event’ (Marx et al., 1972: 295). It may perhaps be a symptom of his metaphorical optimism
that Engels imagines all those forces intersecting into something so neat (albeit ‘infinite’) as parallelograms, but it nonetheless constitutes an invitation to trace some of those tranversal lines.

‘The knowledge that makes a difference in changing the world,’ Anna Tsing writes, ‘is knowledge that travels and mobilizes, shifting and creating new forces and agents of history in its path’ (Tsing, 2005: 8). My effort to put a shape on the knowledge in this thesis requires that I travel now, to mobilise some relatively abstract critical theory and visit the realm of potentially mixed metaphor. Paradoxically, it seems to me that I do this precisely to account for the most concrete and journalistic aspects of my work, especially the chapters in Part 3 of this volume that recount and embody a number of forms of resistance practice – praxis that might be said to involve crossing borders, but not necessarily at the designated checkpoints. Here the reportorial focus is on what Docherty calls

the “events” that constitute the possibility of difference…. An event, we might say, is what happens when we know that something is happening but we do not know what it is that is happening. The “outcome” of the event is entirely unforeseeable, unpredictable (2003: 223).

The events, in this case, are challenges at the edge of hegemony, performed by figures from Feargus O’Connor to Chelsea Manning – ‘it is only through particular acts of resisting particular configurations of power that the seeds of an alternative normative position can be sown’ (Fenton, 2016: 11). In a piquant metaphor by Laclau and Mouffe, the authors write: ‘one can see hegemony as a theory of the decision taken in an undecidable terrain’ (2001: xi). Part of the challenge is often the reterritorialisation of that terrain as constituting part of the political domain, challenging elite ideas that seek to fix what constitutes the political (de Vries, 2014). Laclau and Mouffe contend that a ‘moment of dislocation’ is vital to a new (counter-) hegemonic practice: ‘For example, a
trade union or a religious organization may take on organizational functions in a community [that] go beyond the traditional practices ascribed to them’ (2001: 141–142). In my work, chapter 3.5, about Irish artists’ ‘Manning Truthfest’ in Wales, is merely the most obvious story of ‘dislocation to map new territories’ here. As Laclau and Mouffe note: ‘[T]he establishment of a new hegemony… requires the creation of new political frontiers, not their disappearance’ (2001: xv).

Those frontiers, however, are transverse, cutting across old lines. To adopt the famous formulation of Gilles Deleuze, they represent a ‘line of flight’ – flight in the sense of fleeing rather than flying. Where you have an existing binary, that line comes from elsewhere and disrupts the binary nature of the two, no more inscribing itself in their opposition than in their complementarity. It’s not a matter of adding a new segment on the line to preceding segments (a third sex, a third class, a third age), but of tracing a line that carries them away according to variable speeds in a movement of flight or flow (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007: 177).

Writing originally during the Cold War, Deleuze and Claire Parnet offered by way of example an image of how the East-West divide is ‘de-stabilised’ by a North-South line (2007: 177).

The more-than-a-metaphor of the line of flight is irresistible in the context of a thesis that has as a central character Bruce Springsteen, who called both his most famous song and his memoir (2016) *Born to Run*. His was never purely an escapist vision, and chapter 3.1 establishes that Springsteen’s version of running was manifestly, by the 21st century, along a disruptive line of flight. As Deleuze and Felix Guattari write:

Lines of flight, for their part, never consist in running away from the world but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a hole in a pipe; there is no social

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18 The first third of Springsteen’s book is full of formative, friction-filled transcultural encounters of race, ethnicity, class and musical genre, many of them mapped with striking specificity onto the highways, beaches and bars of central New Jersey.
system that does not leak from all directions, even if it makes its segments increasingly rigid in order to seal the lines of flight. There is nothing imaginary, nothing symbolic, about a line of flight. There is nothing more active than a line of flight, among animals or humans (1987: 204).

Black Panther activist George Jackson phrased it more bluntly than Springsteen might: ‘I may be running, but I'm looking for a gun as I go’ (quoted in Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 204). ‘It is on lines of flight that new weapons are invented,’ Deleuze and Guattari insist, ‘to be turned against the heavy arms of the State’ (1987: 204).

Gilbert argues persuasively that the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari are compatible with Gramscian hegemony, and help us ‘understand the psycho-socio-physical complexity of its mechanics’ (Gilbert, 2008: 147). Under neoliberal hegemony, for Gilbert, lines of flight are

   for capital and only for capital: all other routes are blocked, all other becomeings delegitimated; mobility is only permitted precisely to the extent that the object, subject or agent in question (e.g. the student, education) can take on the form of capital or the commodity (2008: 174).

That’s the theory. In practice, the blockage, or what Deleuze and Guattari call the seal, is leaky – especially in the light of crises that mean capitalism can’t keep its promises of limitlessly rising expectations.

But if it is impossible for capitalism to control all lines of flight, it is important that, like the concept of hegemony, the line of flight is understood dialectically: it is a way of constructing resistance and also ‘is primary in, and functional to, capitalist assemblages’ (Thoburn, 2003: 2). Capitalism trades in disruptions and expansions, in the commodification of immaterial things. Its lines of flight are aggressive and inescapable, Gilbert suggests:

   [Y]ou can run and hide, in your commune, squat, art gallery, laboratory or university department, but neoliberalism will find you soon enough. If you don’t
want to be deterritorialised and recodified by it, then you had better start looking for allies (Gilbert, 2008: 187).

The idea that alliances are fundamental to a project of emancipation is key not only to the Gramscian conception of the ‘historical bloc’, but also to tempering the rather individualist, even macho, sensibility that colours some of Delueze’s thrusting, weaponised accounts of the potentially liberatory line of flight. Arguably, by joining the line of flight to another metaphor, Tsing’s ‘friction’, it is better understood as contingent and relational. Friction, for Tsing, is a powerful tool in her global ethnography of flows of capital and resistance – it is ‘the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference.... the grip of encounter’ (2005: 4–5). Tsing’s account of friction, indeed, captures the essence of the ‘trans’:

A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere. Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power (2005: 5).

The concept of friction is itself an answer to the hegemonic ideas of free and frictionless globalisation, lauded, for example, in the work of *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman (2005). As Tsing writes: ‘In fact, motion does not proceed this [frictionless] way at all. How we run depends on what shoes we have to run in’ (2005: 5). But friction, Tsing writes, also helps us conceptualise the way power and resistance work across the same processes from different angles, in competing lines of flight:

Friction is not a synonym for resistance. Hegemony is made as well as unmade with friction.... Friction makes global connection powerful and effective. Meanwhile, without even trying, friction gets in the way of the smooth operation of global power (Tsing, 2005: 6).
In moments of friction, Irish nationalists ally with English Chartists (chapter 3.2); George Bush enlists Bono to fight AIDS (chapter 2.7); a rapper awaits an election for his chance to entertain Gaza (chapter 3.6); the new Irish state uses religion to cement its power (chapter 3.3). ‘Unexpected alliances arise, remaking global possibilities,’ as Tsing notes (2005: 12).

Of course one way in which global possibilities are made and remade is via war. While Deleuze and Guattari characteristically note with some optimism that the conditions that facilitate the global war machine ‘continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack’ (1987: 422), the more common human response to war is not counterattack but rather the most literal line of flight. Reflecting ironically on the glories of global movement, Tsing notes: ‘Some of the time, we don’t want to go at all, and we leave town only when they’ve bombed our homes’ (2005: 6).

Refugees, deportees and various desperate and constrained migrants are present in about half the chapters in this thesis. A Springsteen song swims with them across the US-Mexican border; the Irish police block their line of flight on the Belfast train; asylum-seekers in Leitrim dance in memory of the deported Jim Gralton; activists drawn from the Irish diaspora try to stop the imperial line of flight at Shannon Airport. As this work is completed in the midst of a refugee ‘crisis’ that resides mainly in the Middle East and Africa but has had a considerable European dimension, the self-organisation of migrants in places like Calais insistently renders them not merely as humanitarian objects but as political subjects (Izhar, 2016), fighting efforts to interrupt and reverse their lines of flight. Throughout the world, the small and large actions and mobilisations of solidarity described by Agustin and Jørgensen (2016) have the potential, albeit against large odds, to reshape the politics of migration.
This moment has the potential to move us closer to answering Hardt and Negri’s question: ‘How can we recognize (and reveal) a constituent political tendency within and beyond the spontaneity of the multitude’s movements?’ (2001: 398) Hardt and Negri note how the global order, which they call Empire, both needs and criminalises these movements, often labelling the northward migration lines into the US and Europe as ‘cocaine trails’ or ‘paths of terrorism’ (2001: 398):

Imperial capital does indeed attack the movements of the multitude with a tireless determination: it patrols the seas and the borders; within each country it divides and segregates; and in the world of labor it reinforces the cleavages and borderlines of race, gender, language, culture, and so forth. Even then, however, it must be careful not to restrict the productivity of the multitude too much because Empire too depends on this power. The movements of the multitude have to be allowed to extend always wider across the world scene, and the attempts at repressing the multitude are really paradoxical, inverted manifestations of its strength (Hardt and Negri, 2001: 399).

The potential power of an increasingly denationalised multitude is enormous, but usually its lines of flight are too uncoordinated to constitute a threat to imperial hegemony, especially when Empire dangles before its luckiest refugees ‘a supple, multicultural aesthetic that deactivates the revolutionary possibilities of globalization’ (Balakrishnan, 2000: 144). There remains, nevertheless, a kernel of hard truth in the subject-position of exile. ‘The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional,’ Edward Said writes. ‘Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience’ (Said, 2000: 266). In places like the Jungle in Calais or the camps of Lesvos island in Greece, where international solidarity organisers mix with migrants of many nationalities, the barriers have been falling. According to Deleuze and Parnet, the exile, the multitude, thus liberated, can reshape the political frontier:

The great ruptures and oppositions are always negotiable, but not the little cracks and imperceptible ruptures that come from the south…. As Godard says, what counts are not only the two opposed camps on the great line where they confront
each other, but also the frontier along which everything passes and runs on a broken molecular line with a different orientation (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007: 177).

**Conclusion: Palestine and Beyond**

As Deleuze and Parnet go on to rehearse (in an essay originally written in the 1970s) a list of upheavals from ‘the south’ – feminism, ecology, dissidence – they include a ‘Corsica here, elsewhere a Palestine’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007: 177). In the intervening decades, Palestine has cemented its unwanted place as the quintessence of the frontier that is not merely the site of struggle, but whose very shape is contested. Palestine is, as Ghada Karmi writes, ‘an idea, an aspiration, and a symbol for everyone who has lost and longed for restitution and recompense’ (Karmi, 2009: xvii). Palestine’s elevation to narrative centrality, a place where global lines of flight converge, is captured in a recent article:

> [E]very issue that concerns the world today seems to have a manifestation in or a connection with Palestine/Israel, from Armageddon to Zanu PF. Race, ethnicity and migration are obvious, but consider architecture and town planning, or the environment and water, think about democracy and the relationship of the citizen to the state, or the media and language and its uses – and misuses – or food, film, music and cultural appropriation, consider narrative and colonialism and post-colonialism and post-postcolonialism, and, very pertinently now, the globalization and theorizing of militarized security. Israel/Palestine is central to it all (Soueif, 2016: 7).

Most of these issues make their way into chapter 3.6, an account of a 2013 trip to Gaza – a territory where refugee status is so ubiquitous and seemingly permanent that its main governing authority is a UN agency. When reporting and analysing Palestine, it is crucial that, as Meaghan Morris writes in a different context, ‘[g]lobal structures of power and forces of occupation... do not drop out of the analytical field’ (Morris, 2007: 134). I think of the passage in that ‘Gaza Diary’ when our Irish and Palestinian travelling group is stranded for a few hours at Rafah, waiting to pass from Muslim-Brotherhood-controlled Egypt (‘controlled’ is a strong word for the melee of political
and social life we found there) to Gaza and Hamas, and we watch gleaming trucks carry Qatari building material to repair the latest war damage. These trucks have been permitted by Israel, which is not represented at this border, and are viewed as something of a Hamas victory. We are surrounded by hundreds of people hoping to cross or to meet someone who is crossing, and I fear my words cannot do justice to all this friction, all these lines of flight.

The logic of my approach here is akin to what Soueif (2016: 8) calls ‘New Discourse travel writing’. Like other recent westerners writing in Palestine, I ‘don’t seek to explain or interpret the Palestinians,... merely frame them and amplify their voices [and] don’t pretend [my] thoughts and impressions are worth more than those of others’ (Soueif, 2016: 8). It is one part of my larger journalistic and critical project, to try to ‘be inside and outside a position at the same time – to occupy a territory while loitering sceptically on the boundary’ (Eagleton, 2003: 40). It reflects some traditional journalistic values while partaking of the ethnographic practice of participant observation.

But of course elsewhere in this thesis I am making, and offering, critical judgments. While the young Bono often seemed to try to speak in the voice of prophecy – and I criticise many of that voice’s emanations – it is my contention that Bruce Springsteen and the others who feature in Part 3 have taken on the task of what Cornell West calls ‘prophetic criticism’ (1999: 264), with a mission to demystify capitalist and imperial hegemony – something I also attempt to do myself. ‘Demystification tries to keep track of the complex dynamics of… power structures in order to disclose options and alternatives for transformative praxis’ (West, 1999: 264). The demystified interaction of structure and praxis is the central process in my work, with the aim of helping to forge
transformative tools. If, alongside the utopianism, there seems something a little earnestly utilitarian about the mission, it cannot be helped. As Terry Eagleton writes wryly: ‘we would know that a social order had improved… when we no longer felt the compulsion to justify our thinking at the bar of utility’ (2003: 87). There appears no immediate prospect of abandoning such rationales for our thinking: the hegemonic task remains enormous, the lines of flight apparently chaotic.

However, and with ‘optimism of the will’ at the forefront of my mind, I am happy to suggest that if we follow many of those lines of flight, including the ones traced in the forthcoming chapters, we can re-orient the boundaries of struggle; that if we edge up against the forces and institutions that confront us, and feel the friction, we can make them move; that if we seek our alliances in changing, transversal borderlands of nation, culture, and experience, we can remake the world. I present this thesis as representing the fundamental unity of theory and practice, a work of subversion and survival. I agree with Stuart Hall that ‘there is all the difference in the world between understanding the politics of intellectual work and substituting intellectual work for politics’ (2007: 44), and will try to avoid the latter. Finally, more to the point, I concur with Antonio Gramsci, who wrote what could be an epigram for the perpetually curious, globally voracious and intellectually promiscuous journalist-scholar-activist: ‘Everything is political, even philosophy or philosophies… and the only “philosophy” is history in action, that is, life itself’ (1971: 357).
References for Part 1


Part 2

Soft Power
Chapter 2.1
Foundation-Funded Journalism: Reasons to be wary of charitable support


Abstract

This paper looks at examples of journalistic institutions that receive prior funding (as opposed to post facto reward) from charitable foundations. It examines ProPublica in the United States (financed by the Sandler Family Supporting Foundation), Transitions Online in Eastern Europe (financed initially by the Open Society Institute) and the Centre for Public Inquiry in Ireland (closed down by its sole funder, Atlantic Philanthropies, after a government and press campaign against its executive director). Drawing on the sociological literature about foundations, it raises questions about the purposes of philanthropy, about the transparency of media that use philanthropically funded material, and about the assumption of a unitary “public interest” common to both philanthropy and to traditional journalism. It concludes that both a critical understanding of foundations themselves and a consideration of the case-studies presented should encourage wariness about philanthropic funding as an unproblematic model for the future of journalism.

Introduction

In recent years, and especially since 2008 when the ongoing crisis in Western print journalism was met and accelerated by the global economic crisis – so that tumbling circulation seemed an almost quaint concern beside collapsing advertising revenue – there has been increased discussion of new funding models for journalism based on the supposition that its practice and production constitutes a public good worthy of state and
foundation support. The question of state support has attracted some controversy, especially in the United States where the “public service broadcasting” tradition is relatively marginal and most journalists appear to regard state support as anathema. However, there has been relatively little critical consideration of foundation support.

With the idea that journalism is, in effect, a charity case having moved into the mainstream, journalists and researchers have been examining how journalism has been, and might in future, be funded by charitable foundations. The concerns about bias and control that characterise much of the discussion of state funding have not been prominent in the discussion of foundation funding. Carol Guensberg’s (2008) article on “Nonprofit News” in the influential American Journalism Review set a tone of cautious hope, only slightly tempered by critical concerns, that has remained around the concept. The most oft-expressed worry has been that foundations will be forced to cut back on funding journalism because of their own financial worries in the wake of the global financial crisis.

Westphal (2009) is among the researcher/journalists to highlight and welcome the support of foundations for journalism, with the major caveat being whether the charitable sector can do enough to make a real difference, and little attention paid to other, editorial, dangers potentially inherent in foundation funding. When he does briefly address such matters, he gives equal standing to the potential worries of readers and those of foundations themselves. Here he describes the Kaiser Family Foundation’s support for a health-news initiative:

This model, in which special-interest foundations establish news organizations that report on funders’ interest areas, traditionally has raised several concerns. For health-news consumers, there’s the question of whether the coverage is somehow [sic] shaped by the interests of the funder. For foundations, there’s the loss-of-control issue when a firewall is established between funder and news organization. “This is the first time we’ll be funding health information that we’re not really controlling,” said [Kaiser Foundation senior vice president Matt] James. (Westphal, 2009, p. 7)
The nature, or even the theoretical plausibility, of that alleged “firewall” is not really explored, and the word “really” is left hanging suggestively in the funder’s quote.

McChesney and Nichols (2010), left-liberal critics of American mainstream media structures and bias, deal briefly with the issue in their recent study-cum-polemic on journalism’s woes and the solutions to them. “Leaving ‘aside the issue of whether we want foundations to have this much power,” they write, “‘how realistic is the foundation-funding model for the next generation of journalists?’” (2010, p. 87). The authors really do leave that issue of power aside, concentrating instead on the cash caveat, i.e. how little money foundations have made available for nonprofit journalism: in 2008 it was “less than one-tenth of the annual newsroom budget of . . . The New York Times” (2010, p. 88). Having suggested that philanthropy is not equal to the scale of the problem in journalism – “‘we would feel a lot better if [the $20 million paid to nonprofits by foundations in 2008] had a few more digits attached to it” (2010, p. 88) – they proceed nonetheless to praise the philanthropists: “we welcome foundations that want to write checks” (2010, p. 88) and to note that “there is much to celebrate in the willingness” of such foundations to support journalism (2010, p. 97).

The present paper presents three cases of journalism funded by foundations and is based on fundamental questions about the role of foundations derived from sociology rather than journalism studies. There has not, as yet, been any comprehensive content analysis of the work produced by foundation-funded journalists and it would be unfair to jump to critical conclusions via anecdote. There is, moreover, no doubt that there is some important work being conducted in and via the support of these institutions, as indeed the above-mentioned studies illustrate. Removing direct commercial pressures from some of the practice of journalism could, logically, result in an improvement in some of that journalism – by giving reporters more time to work on a story, by freeing them to pursue
less-popular topics and by reducing the likelihood of pressure from an owner or advertiser.

The case-study element of the research presented here looks at some elements of the work of three significant foundation-funded journalistic non-profits, ProPublica in the United States, the Centre for Public Inquiry in Ireland, and Transitions Online in Eastern Europe. It does not examine these organisations comprehensively. It is intended to be suggestive rather than definitive, and is in effect a “gatekeeping” study as defined by Shoemaker et al. (2009), looking at possible influences on journalistic content. Those authors, drawing on earlier research, “propose that five levels of analysis are appropriate to the study of communication content: the individual, media routines, organization, extramedia, and ideological levels” (2009, p. 81). This study focuses mainly at the level of the organisation, through the examination of three journalistic organisations that were brought into being through the direct intervention of philanthropic foundations; despite their centrality in each case, however, the foundations themselves remain partly at a distinct and separate level of analysis, that of the “non-media social institution” (2009, p. 82). Clearly not every case of philanthropic support of journalism will involve such a close and organic relationship between the levels of organisation as exists, at least historically, in all three case-studies here. A philanthropically funded journalistic organisation might have diverse funders, or an individual reporter might seek one-off financial support for a particular story. However, for the purposes of this study, the broad similarity of the three cases examined, in which organisations were called into being by philanthropy, should keep the analytical framework relatively simple.

This study takes a more heterogeneous approach to the “unit of analysis” (Shoemaker et al., 2009, p. 81) that is appropriate to each case-study: in the first case, it focuses on the micro unit of the individual report; whereas the latter two cases deal with macro
questions, including (in one case) the very survival of the journalistic organisation itself because of a crisis in its relationship with the funding organisation.

The necessarily limited and specific nature of the case-studies is preceded, below, by insights drawn from historical, sociological and political writings that raise more broad and basic questions about the role of foundations and, therefore, of their potential role in facilitating critical and questioning journalism. Combining these insights with the case-studies, it is contended that “nonprofit news” raises some of the same problems as commercial journalism – including serving agendas that may possibly be hidden and hewing to establishment-defined ideological limits – while potentially adding some new ones of its own. These latter problems include: encouraging journalists to anticipate and chase after the perhaps-idiosyncratic whims of funders (some academics may be familiar with this phenomenon); creating awkward conflicts of interest due to the often-delicate relationships between charitable funders and the state bodies the journalists should be investigating; and subsidising the very news organisations whose conspicuous failures have helped to create the current crisis for the profession. [Davies (2008) has been joined by McChesney and Nichols (2010) as required reading for those seeking transatlantic analysis of precisely how those existing institutions are blame-worthy.] This article occupies itself principally with these three areas of potential objection to foundation-funding for journalism. An additional concern, not addressed in these pages but voiced by some practising journalists with whom the author has discussed this matter, is the possibility that foundation funding will push reporters towards “long-termism” and excessive seriousness and jargon in their work, moving the affected journalism further away from a mass audience as it becomes increasingly configured for foundation evaluators, policy-makers and other elites.

None of these issues should be regarded as reasons to dismiss foundations as potential sources of funding for journalism, which has never been pure and cannot afford to be
choosy. But taken together they do suggest causes for concern that go beyond those voiced in most of the extant literature.

**The Benevolent Fog**

In a passage about the ethical confusion that may be engendered by foundations, Edmonds offers a basic note of caution about the philanthropic funding of journalism and, in “benevolent fog”, a useful phrase:

> Here’s a journalistic proposition: it would be ethical for a reporter to accept a grant from the Ford Foundation for coverage of Eastern Europe . . . But it would be wrong to accept a grant from General Motors to cover international trade. GM’s economic interests in the matter would create a perceived conflict of interest . . . Lost in the benevolent fog that surrounds most foundations is the notion that they may have more of an agenda, not less, than a sponsoring corporation. (Edmonds, 2002)

Edmonds’ example, contrasting attitudes toward funding from a foundation based on an automotive dynasty to funding from an automotive dynasty per se, is not purely theoretical: it is based, he writes, on the news-policy manual of America’s National Public Radio, which makes precisely this distinction between foundation support (good) and corporate sponsorship (bad, at least potentially). The broadly sceptical thrust of Edmonds’ research, conducted for the highly regarded Poynter Institute, itself involved in direct support of journalism, has had remarkably little echo in the intervening years. (Slate.com media analyst Jack Shafer has been perhaps the most persistent and prominent critic of the foundation model*see for example Shafer, 2009.)

Bob Feldman (2007) is an exception in the academic literature. Writing from personal experience of left-leaning media organisations in the United States, he asserts – albeit largely anecdotally – that their politics have, broadly, been channelled in recent decades into “safe, legalistic, bureaucratic activities and mild reformism” (2007, p. 427) largely through the influence of their foundation backers. He notes that those organisations that
are “primarily concerned about threats to media independence [focus] all their attention . . . on for-profit or government control; they ignore the possible influence of large subventions from non-profit institutions such as foundations” (2007, p. 428). Foundations often operate in a “climate of secrecy” (2007, p. 428) and effectively manage the organisations they fund through meetings, conferences and suggestions, domesticating their agendas. To document the degree to which this sort of foundation support/management/pressure has resulted in left-leaning media turning safer and duller would “require a massive research project unlikely to find funding” (2007, p. 429).

Feldman’s tone of righteous indignation tempered by weary humour is common to the sociological literature that is more broadly critical of foundations:

The critical study of foundations is not a subfield in any academic discipline; it is not even an organised interdisciplinary grouping. This, along with concerns about personal defunding, limits its output, especially as compared to that of the many well-endowed centres for the uncritical study of foundation. (Roelofs et al., 2007, p. 387)

There are “more critical studies of foundation garments”, Roelofs et al. (2007, p. 387) write, than there are of foundations.

Concerns about the power and influence of foundations appear more likely to be voiced on the conspiratorial right than on the academic or political left. The recent statement by noted Marxist geographer David Harvey in which he attributed some of the success of neoliberalism in recent decades to capitalists’ “shaping of oppositional cultures through the promotion of NGOs [non-governmental organisations]” (Harvey, 2009) is a typical passing but undeveloped echo of Feldman. Occasionally a specific foundation comes under critical scrutiny from the left, as when economist Rob Larson attacked the Clinton Foundation for being “funded by the people, governments, and companies that help create the problems that the charity seeks to address” (Larson, 2009).
Research, and indeed polemic, from the realm of “critical foundation studies” has tended to focus on the effects of foundation funding on the priorities of academic researchers and global-development organisations. According to Arnove and Pinede (2007), basing their findings on long-term studies of the “big three” US-based Foundations – Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie – “they have played the role of unofficial planning agencies for both a national American society and an increasingly interconnected world system with the United States at its center” with an “elitist, technocratic approach to social change” (2007, p. 392). While the authors’ problem with the foundations might at first glance appear to be a matter of political difference – the foundations “engage in amelioristic practices to maintain social and economic systems that generate the very inequality and injustices they wish to correct” (2007, p. 391) – the details of their research raise longstanding questions about how foundations set, and change, agendas. They quote from a 1930 essay by Fabian theorist Harold Laski, who wrote:

> The foundations do not control, simply because, in the simple and direct sense of the word, there is no need for them to do so. They have only to indicate the immediate direction of their minds for the whole university world to discover that it always meant to gravitate swiftly to that angle of the intellectual compass. (Laski, in Arnove and Pinede, 2007, p. 415)

Chasing after the mind of a proprietor or editor is not unknown in journalism. However, the supposition that the foundation represents a cleaner, less capricious form of direction than the commercial proprietor does not always stand up to scrutiny. “In 1996 and 1997 . . . the Ford Foundation . . . sent shock waves through the academic world by calling into question the validity of area studies programs that had been largely established and sustained by the Rockefeller Foundation and Ford Foundation” (Arnove and Pinede, 2007, p. 414). The authors document how in the 1990s the foundations created bitter divisions in African and Eastern European academia, and in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks the Ford and Rockefeller foundations instituted a pledge for recipients that they would not “promote or engage in violence, terrorism, bigotry or the destruction of any
state” (2007, p. 419). (Such a requirement might sound unproblematic, but, strictly interpreted, the last phrase bars those it funds from, for example, advocating the replacement of Israel by a binational Jewish Palestinian state, or the splitting of Iraq, Afghanistan or the Congo into new ethnic and/or sectarian states.)

Within the world of philanthropy it is not controversial that the activities of foundations are intended as an exercise of power for particular ends, though of course those ends are typically depicted as benign. Sean Stannard-Stockton, a columnist for the Chronicle of Philanthropy, has written about how philanthropists “attempt to shape events by providing or withdrawing grants”; he calls this “a form of hard power that leans heavily on the idea that influence is best achieved through offers of incentives or threats of penalties” (Stannard-Stockton, 2010). Borrowing the term “soft power” from the study of inter-state relations, where it means essentially seeking influence through “attraction” rather than through the “carrot and stick”, the author joins fellow philanthropy-adviser John Brothers (2010) in mild criticism of foundations for relying too much on “punishment and reward” to achieve their ends.

The central critique of foundations by critical scholars is more fundamental: that they are an important component of the establishment and maintenance of existing structures of elite control, both in particular states and within the larger global system. The extent to which, therefore, they can contribute to changing, or even scrutinising and critiquing, those structures must therefore be in some question. “We must continue to ask whether or not foundations can achieve an end that runs counter to the core interests of those who have contributed to create these foundations” (Fasenfest, 2007, p. 382). With trustees still largely drawn from the ranks of “well-connected members of the establishment” (Arnove and Pinede, 2007, p. 417), the foundations support programmes that may serve as an escape valve or the lubricant for relieving pressures and smoothing out the functioning of a social and economic system that depends, in great part, on
charitable giving to alleviate the inequalities and misery it generates. (Arnove and Pinede, 2007, p. 422)

Although the authors do not discuss journalism per se, it is not difficult to conceive of journalism in such valve/lubricant roles. The practice of journalism to date in covering foundation-related issues – i.e. the fact that foundations are largely ignored in journalistic accounts of institutions wielding social and political power – lends further credence to the critique. Even before they began widespread funding of journalism, foundations have rarely been held to account by journalists for their position of extraordinary power. One foundation president, in no less a forum than the Rockefeller Foundation’s annual report, has acknowledged frankly that among the privileges enjoyed by foundations is the quiescence of the press:

Foundations lack the three chastising disciplines of American life: the market test, which punishes or rewards financial performance; the ballot box, through which the numbskulls can be voted out of office; and the ministrations of an irreverent press biting at your heads every day. (Goldmark, 1997)

**ProPublica**

In recent years a charitable foundation, and effectively its single benefactor, has created what is by its own account the largest investigative newsroom in the world, in the form of ProPublica. The New York-based non-profit organisation, directed by a former managing editor from the Wall Street Journal, Paul Steiger, is the creation of Herb Sandler, who with his wife Marion was boss of World Savings Bank. The couple were named in *Time* magazine in February 2009 as among the “25 people to blame for the financial crisis” for promoting “tricky home loans” with “misleading advertising” (*Time*, 2009). (No mention was made by *Time* of the Sandlers’ munificence to journalism.) The Sandler Family Supporting Foundation, a funder of liberal causes (Nocera, 2008) in the United States, supports ProPublica with $10 million annually. “Stories which have moral force, stories that are important to the sustainability of a democracy”, Sandler is quoted
as saying, “those are the stories I hope we will be doing.” (in Perry, 2007) (The “we” is appropriate: Sandler serves as chair of ProPublica as well as its chief benefactor.)

Its provenance in the financially and politically active elite must raise questions about ProPublica, notwithstanding its Pulitzer Prize, and also notwithstanding its particularly clear and comprehensive coverage of financial issues and the US government’s stimulus package. It has not gone uncriticised: in the culture of journalism in the United States, with its traditional emphasis on “city beat” journalism, ProPublica’s national scope and ambitions have attracted concern, including from a media blogger who worried that it would skew investigations toward the big national stories that would gain exposure in national media anyway:

This grandiosity suggested that Pro Publica wouldn’t be looking where the need was greatest, to the middle markets whose papers were pulling in their investigative horns, thereby giving a pass . . . to corruption in the local city hall and assessor’s office. (Miner, 2008)

ProPublica’s first major report was a national/international story, produced jointly with the commercial news network CBS and its TV flagship 60 Minutes programme. It was an investigation into another news organisation – the US government-funded Arabic TV station Al Hurra. The questions raised by the report, however, go beyond the fact that it was national/international in scope, or even that, as Miner observed, that it hardly filled a media void, given that the Washington Post did a similar expose´ about Al Hurra on the same day. The joint report (CBS News, 2008, with material also available on propublica.org) carries the ProPublica logo but is otherwise difficult to distinguish from an ordinary 60 Minutes report. It sets out to show that the US government had been wasting its money by creating an Arabic news channel – and part of its method is to engage in borderline caricature of “dysfunctional” Arabs and to criticise the Virginia-based station for airing points of view, critical of Israel in particular, that are largely uncontroversial in the Arab world. The report certainly does nothing to challenge the
common US mainstream view that attacking Israel is inherently wrong; indeed it essentially and implicitly adopts that view. A transcript of the televised report is available on the 60 Minutes website, and there is a revealing passage that includes an interview with an American who had been brought in to Al Hurra on what proved a futile mission to straighten out the “imported” Arab staff:

Larry Register, a former CNN executive with 20 years of experience, who was brought in a-year-and-half ago to rescue the channel . . . says he found his staff of Arabs, imported from the region, divided along religious, ethnic and political lines. Asked what state the channel was in when he first walked in the Al Hurra newsroom, Register tells [60 Minutes reporter] Scott Pelley, “Dysfunctional, extremely dysfunctional.”

“Words like militias were thrown around,” he explains. “There was this militia that was in charge of this, and this militia in charge of that.”

“It felt like you were living in the Middle East. It felt like somebody had picked up the Middle East and brought it to Springfield, Virginia, of all places,” Register remembers.

When Register wanted to put on breaking news his first week, he says he found his staff was out to lunch, literally. “There was nobody there. The whole newsroom was empty,” he remembers. “Everybody’d gone to lunch. So I’m asking, ‘Well, what is this?’

‘Well, they take three hour lunches in between programs.’” (CBS News, 2008)

No one notes that long breaks in the middle of the day, generally combined with late evenings, are standard working practice in the Mediterranean region. The “militia” comment, which could be interpreted as a suggestion that paramilitaries controlled various departments within the station, is left to rest as though it was a normal bit of Arab “colour”, its significance unexplained.

Al Hurra, to be sure, could be legitimately criticised. A particularly egregious item on the Arabic station from a credulous reporter at an Iranian Holocaust-denial conference came in for appropriate opprobrium (CBS News, 2008). But Scott Pelley’s line of questioning to a station executive lumped it together with other aspects of the programming that would surely have enhanced its credibility among Arabs:

There’s a pattern here, critics of this channel say. You have Nasrallah [the Hezbollah leader] given an hour of air time. You have the Holocaust deniers conference
covered. Now, you have this person saying that Israel is a racist state. Is this the kind of thing the American taxpayer should be paying for? (CBS News, 2008)

It is arguable that for its first major report, ProPublica not only subsidised a massive corporate news operation, but that it did so within traditional ideological constraints – most obviously the denigration of Arabs and unqualified support for Israel that so many critical analysts have deemed to be characteristic of the major US news providers.

**Centre for Public Inquiry**

In addition to its major funding from Sandler’s foundation, ProPublica also receives some funding, albeit a relative drop in the ocean, from the Atlantic Philanthropies, the charitable foundation based on the fortune of Irish-American airport-duty-free entrepreneur Chuck Feeney. Atlantic was the sole significant funder of the Centre for Public Inquiry (CPI), a short-lived Dublin-based investigative organisation run by one of Ireland’s leading investigative journalists, Frank Connolly – whose reporting on political corruption, mainly in the planning process, had helped to bring about major state-run tribunals of investigation in the late 1990s (O’Clery, 2007, p. 276). The brief year of operation of the CPI in 2005-06 tells a complex and cautionary tale about the nexus into which journalism enters when it forms relationships with the philanthropic sector.

The philanthropist behind Atlantic, Feeney, is famously shy. However, the respected veteran Irish journalist Conor O’Clery won considerable access to write a biography (O’Clery, 2007) and O’Clery was subsequently involved in an Irish television documentary, a flattering portrait of the admirable and modest “secret billionaire” in May 2009 (RTE, 2009). (In that programme one interviewee intoned “I think he’s a saint” and not need have feared any contradiction.) The book and programme were made with Feeney’s co-operation and thus also secured interviews with major figures in the Irish political and educational establishment. Both sources establish that Feeney, through his
quiet and conditional offers of cash from the late 1990s onward, effectively directed some higher-education policy in the Irish state and among other things brought about the creation of an allegedly state-directed funding initiative, the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions. Whether this was a good thing is not a matter of concern here; the point is that, like many charitable foundations, Feeney’s Atlantic Philanthropies was operating not simply in the NGO sector but in close co-operation with elements of the state itself. For example, O’Clery documents how in 2003 the foundation threatened the prime minister, Bertie Ahern, that Atlantic would stop paying for research in Ireland if the government insisted on cutting its own contribution: Ahern obliged by using private pressure and press leaks to force the hesitant education minister to maintain state support for the sector (O’Clery, 2007, pp. 274 5).

Feeney had met journalist Frank Connolly during the 1990s in the course of the billionaire’s involvement, together with other Irish-American business people, in the Northern Ireland peace process (O’Clery, 2007, pp. 276 7). After several friendly meetings they came to discuss Connolly’s work on political corruption, and Feeney told Connolly that Atlantic had helped to fund an investigative body, the Center for Public Integrity, in the United States. By 2004 Connolly and Atlantic Philanthropies had developed a plan to establish an analogous body in Ireland (Connolly, 2009, interview with author): “Connolly, a serious, methodical investigator, seemed an ideal choice” as director (O’Clery, 2007, p. 276). The CPI would get €4 million funding for its first five years of work, beginning in 2005. Former Irish prime minister Bertie Ahern (himself later the subject of investigations, including by Connolly, that forced him out of office in 2008) told the documentary-makers that, when he heard of this plan to finance such an organisation, he approached Feeney directly to tell him that it was not necessary or advisable (RTE, 2009).
The matter was complicated by the fact that the CPI director, Connolly, was known for his left-leaning views and investigative pursuit of Ahern and other senior political figures. Furthermore, Connolly had family ties to the IRA – his brother Niall had been arrested in Colombia in 2001, allegedly making contact with rebel groups there. Strong criticism of Connolly and the CPI was voiced publicly by politicians, and some journalists, especially in Tony O’Reilly’s Independent group of newspapers, took up the campaign against the CPI (O’Clery, 2007, pp. 277 83).

The Centre’s first two investigative reports were published in the second half of 2005 in what were intended to be the first two editions of a new publication, Fiosru´ (“enquiry” in the Irish language). They were generally seen as scrupulous and well-respected studies of, first, conflicts of interest in planning around a historic site in Trim, County Meath, and, second, the complex legal and political history of a controversial Shell gas-pipeline project in County Mayo. The latter, in particular, was a strong intervention in a major public dispute that had seen (and has continued to see) hundreds of police dispatched to a remote coastal location in the west of Ireland, and the arrest and imprisonment of a number of protesters. The CPI report (Centre for Public Inquiry, 2005a) came down carefully on the side of the protesters against Shell, the government and the pipeline, and raised questions about the political and planning decisions in the background to the project and in relation to other deals for oil and gas exploration off the Irish coast. (Providence Resources, an oil and gas exploration company, is controlled by the same O’Reilly family that dominates the Irish newspaper industry.)

The next CPI investigation intended to probe the Dublin Docklands Development Authority, where politics, finance and property development intersected – like the first two reports, the sort of story that needs a lot of time and context, the resources that “ordinary” journalism finds itself largely unable to provide. The CPI’s five-year plan was,
according to Connolly, an ambitious programme that would have taken it to the highest levels of the political establishment (Frank Connolly, interview, 23 February 2009).

At this point, late in 2005, the Minister for Justice Michael McDowell, by his own public admission, leaked to a well-known journalist for Tony O’Reilly’s Irish Independent newspaper some documents from an investigation into Frank Connolly that appeared to suggest Connolly had several years earlier given false details in a passport application in order to travel to Colombia. Connolly made a public statement on 7 December 2005:

> On November 26th and 27th, in what was patently a considered and timed response to the publication of the Report on the Corrib Gas controversy from those seeking to protect vested interests, the same false allegations were again published by Independent Newspapers concerning me. Further, the Minister for Justice, Mr. Michael McDowell, participated in the attacks and has now repeated the allegations under Dáil privilege. The Minister has purported to usurp the functions of an Garda Síochána [the Irish police force] and the Director of Public Prosecutions and seeks to destroy my reputation by publicly making charges of a criminal nature against me. The Minister has sought to interfere with, if not jeopardise my employment as Executive Director of the Centre for Public Inquiry. By disclosing confidential information from Garda files to a member of the board of Atlantic Philanthropies, which funds the CPI, which is clearly insufficient to support a prosecution against me, he has intended to damage my reputation and my career as an investigative journalist. Furthermore, confidential documents from a Garda investigation file were copied to Independent Newspapers to the damage of a citizen, who is entitled to the presumption of his innocence and to the protection of his good name. The Minister has done a grave injustice and damage to me. He has joined what has become a veritable witch hunt against me. He has also done incalculable damage to the integrity of his own office. (Centre for Public Inquiry, 2005c)

The allegations against Connolly were never proven; however, the now wide-open hostility between Connolly’s CPI and the Irish government was causing discomfort among Atlantic’s representatives in Dublin – who had to work with state bodies in relation to other projects – and through them at Atlantic’s headquarters in New York (Connolly, interview, 23 February 2009). In December 2005, in an answer to a parliamentary question, McDowell (under parliamentary privilege) tied Connolly’s alleged activities to the Colombian rebel FARC organisation and to narco-terrorism. At an Atlantic board
meeting in New York, a fax arrived from Dublin containing McDowell’s charges: after reading it, the board decided that the foundation could no longer fund CPI while Connolly was in charge (O’Clery, 2007, p. 283). Connolly, however, would not step down and the CPI’s own board of directors (comprising a senior journalist, a lawyer, a theologian and a former High Court judge) released a statement to the press expressing support for Connolly:

- The Board of the Centre for Public Inquiry reiterates its full confidence in its Executive Director, Frank Connolly and his integrity.
- The Board notes the recent controversy surrounding the CPI. The claim made in Dáil Eireann by the Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell, that either Frank Connolly or the CPI, or both, could pose a threat to the security of the State is entirely without evidential basis, unsustainable, and totally untrue.
- The CPI is an open, not for profit, organisation. It has published two major reports since it began work in the Spring of 2005. The most recent report concerns the Corrib gas pipeline controversy and appears to have provoked the ire of certain vested interests and their political supporters. The first report concerned the construction of a hotel in the shadow of Trim Castle, County Meath, a national monument in State care. It raised important issues of public concern including the manner in which the objections of the most senior officials charged with protecting the State’s heritage were overruled by a former Minister. Both reports were issued in the public interest, were factually based and devoid of comment. Other inquiries into matters of public importance are currently underway.
- In relation to allegations made against Frank Connolly the Board of the CPI, as a body committed to high standards in public life, believes in valued legal principles such as the presumption of innocence and the application of due process. On Thursday last December 15th, 2005 a letter was issued by the Director for Public Prosecutions. It stated that the DPP had decided on March 7th, 2003, not to prosecute Mr Connolly in relation to allegations, which he has consistently denied, that he used a false passport. This information would have been available to the Minister for Justice, his Department and the Garda authorities for up to two years and eight months yet Mr Connolly was only informed of the DPP’s decision in recent days. The functions and decisions of the DPP are, by statute, independent.
- Despite the DPP’s decision in March 2003 not to prosecute Mr Connolly, a private and public blackening of his character has been unleashed by the Minister. (Centre for Public Inquiry, 2005b).

Atlantic withdrew funding and the CPI was out of money and therefore no longer able to operate within a few weeks (O’Clery, 2007, pp. 283 5). Several years later, aspects of its brief history remain opaque and open to debate; however, for the purposes of this study what is relevant is that Atlantic Philanthropies abandoned its funding of an investigative-journalism organisation because of sensitivity about the relationship between its director
and the government – or, by the very best interpretation, because it came to negative conclusions about that director’s character and behaviour without due process. (Connolly is today press officer for Ireland’s largest trade union.)

Atlantic has since gone on to support the Huffington Post Investigative Fund, causing McChesney and Nichols to praise it as “a journalism-oriented, highly engaged foundation” (2010, p. 97).

Transitions Online

The final case for consideration here is more briefly considered and perhaps lacks the political and journalistic drama of the first two. But it is interesting partly because of that lower level of drama: it relates not to high-profile investigations but to a long-term project by a major funder to influence the development of Eastern European societies in the post-communist period. Transitions Online (TOL) is a partly Web-based NGO project, centred in the Czech Republic, established in 1999 as a successor to Transitions magazine. The “transition” in the title refers to Eastern Europe’s 28 post-communist states, which TOL sets out to cover. Its own work is largely in English, though it offers training to East European journalists who work in their own languages. The original magazine was aimed largely at an academic readership and TOL continues to specialise in education issues (Jeremy Druker, interview, 29 January 2009).

Seeded by George Soros’s Open Society Institute, the TOL project was part of its funder’s wider project to influence the intellectual direction of the region over the last two decades. It can be argued, of course, that the Soros influence on the region has been relatively benign; it cannot be plausibly argued that his influence was neutral in terms of the desired outcomes in political and economic policy. Guilhot (2007) has studied how Soros set out to effect policy favourable for his business interests in the post-communist states by
supporting “transitional” academic projects and creating, in 1991, the Budapest-based
Central European University.

Philanthropic practices allow the dominant classes to generate knowledge about society and regulatory prescriptions, in particular by promoting the development of the social sciences . . . Philanthropy offers a privileged strategy for generating new forms of “policy knowledge” convergent with the interests of their promoters . . . Far from seeking to curb the excesses of economic globalization, such efforts are actually institutionalizing it by laying the foundations of its own regulatory order. (Guilhot, 2007, p. 447)

Perhaps of more direct pertinence to journalism such as that being funded at Transitions, Leslie Sklair writes of how such a project would be directed not only at political and intellectual elites in the region but at a wider public there and elsewhere: Soros and other “corporate philanthropists . . . embody the public relations thrust of the new globalising [transnational capitalist class]” (2007, p. 26).

At the time of writing TOL was no longer funded entirely by Soros. As donor interest has tended to move east across the former Soviet Union, TOL has received a mix of foundation funding (including continuing Soros money for its work on education issues) and support from state-based bodies such as the American National Endowment for Democracy and the Czech foreign ministry for it work on “democracy promotion” in Eastern Europe and southwest Asia. TOL’s director Jeremy Druker said in an interview that funders do not interfere with the NGO’s activities but explained that fundraising does involve persuading donors that “we share your values” (Druker, interview, 29 January 2009). The organisation also generates income from “training”, often involving Western journalists who come east to teach classes to aspiring journalists. In a further example of foundation-supported journalism subsidising traditional commercial operators, TOL’s network of (mostly young) journalists provides coverage of Eastern Europe for the US magazine Business Week, which no longer directly supports a group of independent “stringers” there. According to Druker, the relationship with Business Week (which does
not disclose to its readers the ultimate source of this coverage) is “non-commercial” but good for the organisation (Druker, interview, 29 January 2009).

Thus TOL is a journalistic NGO providing business-friendly coverage of Eastern Europe with funding from an investor with enormous interests there, and incidentally in the process subsidising a commercial news provider that reaches a large American audience.

**Transparency**

How much transparency is there when other mainstream journalism providers use material generated from these not-for-profit outlets? In November 2009, the New York Times published a story by freelance journalist Lindsey Hoshaw, about a Pacific Ocean “garbage patch”. At the end of the story was this simple note: “Travel expenses were paid in part by readers of Spot.Us, a nonprofit Web project that supports freelance journalists” (Hoshaw, 2009). The implication, picked up by the wire agency Agence France-Presse (AFP, 2009) and reported widely online, was that the article was simply “crowd-funded”, commissioned through the enthusiasm of hundreds of donors. Nowhere in the original article or in the AFP report was it pointed out that Spot.Us came into existence thanks to a grant from the Knight Foundation.

Is it arguable that the appearance of foundation-supported material, without clear indication of its ultimate financial provenance, should be regarded as insidious, in much the same way that so many studies of journalism – most famously Davies (2008) – view the proliferation of PR-generated material? It is not possible to answer the question definitively. However, something of an analogy may be drawn to the largely unexamined way that institutions from outside journalism have “colonised” part of the space in many newspapers and websites, via the opinion pages. The proliferation in the last two decades (see Ciafolo, 1998) of space for opinion and commentary (rarely now confined to a single
“op-ed” page) has permitted newspapers to fill space with views and analysis often supplied by “experts” whose employment and interests lie outside the journalistic institution. While expertise is generally to be regarded as a good thing, of course, this expertise may be deployed on behalf of a sometimes-hidden funder. The present employment crisis in commercial journalism, which has seen many journalists move into consultancies and think-tanks where they are expected to offer contributions to newspapers, may exacerbate this trend. I have direct knowledge of one journalist with a considerable body of expertise – and who must remain anonymous here – who was offered a “research” job with a think-tank. She was told that it would essentially involve her continuing to do journalistic work, but that she would now carry her employer’s label with her in print and broadcast appearances: she would have secure employment, her funders would have regular publicity and the newspapers and radio programmes would have an “expert” whom they did not have to employ.

Without romanticising the traditional journalistic value of “independence”, often itself a mystified concept in the context of either state or commercial media, it is legitimate to ask whether such developments can be compatible with such independence.

Conclusion
The increasing role of direct foundation funding for journalism might nonetheless be a cause for celebration, if there was strong reason to believe that the ultimate source of subsidy was both (1) always clear to readers and (2) democratic and responsive to the wider public. However, on examining the cases outlined above and considering the arguments about the nature of foundations themselves, there is at least some reason for concern as to whether these conditions can be met, or whether such support brings new worries for the credibility and viability of journalistic institutions.
It also raises a number of theoretical concerns of interest to journalism scholars. If, as Van Dijk suggests, news can be regarded as form of ideological discourse, how does foundation support affect both the “social knowledge” (2009, p. 195) and the immediate context of journalistic participants? If, as Guilhot (2007) suggests, foundations have explicitly ideological programmes to generate such social knowledge, by what means would this become manifest in reporting, and how might such manifestations be detected by a researcher? A separate matter that may also be worthy of further consideration is whether the largely uncritical embrace of foundation funding among many journalistic professionals arises because, in the context of rapid change in journalism practice driven by technology and finance, it appears to offer them a return to what has been called the “high modernist” conception of “professionalism”, with journalists “conceiving of themselves as, in effect, a representative or stand-in for a unitary but inactive public” (Hallin, 2000, pp. 234 5).

The idea of such a unitary, passively constructed “public interest” is often central to the rhetoric both of traditional journalism and of the philanthropic sector. However, a serious analysis will be forced to admit the possibility that interests come in many shapes and sizes, and operate on all sorts of potentially competing and hidden agendas.

The author has been involved in a minor capacity with a project funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies.

References


There’s a typically fustian *Irish Times* yarn that goes like this: it’s the late 1920s, and the already venerable unionist paper has struggled to reconcile itself to the Free State, much to the discomfort of die-hard readers. The editor, John Edward Healy, is confronted outside the office by one such woman: “Sir,” she says, “the *Irish Times* is not what it used to be.”

“Madam,” Healy replies, “the *Irish Times* was never what it used to be.”

Nowadays, the paper is preparing to move from the offices in the triangle defined by D’Olier Street, Fleet Street and Westmoreland Street, where it has lived for 111 years, and into swish premises a few streets east. And nowadays the general tenor of complaint from older readers – including some *Irish Times* journalists, past and present – is that it has moved to the right politically.

There is a substantial case to be made that this is true. But we should heed the double-warning in Healy’s paradox: (1) nostalgia is usually shortsighted; and (2) a daily newspaper is a ridiculously complex organism that is difficult to pin down to an “is”, let alone a “was”. Just as the paper’s identity as a Protestant, unionist organ was destabilised as society changed, its succeeding reputation as a liberal, occasionally campaigning newspaper – the only reputation it holds for most people today – is highly contingent.

The paper’s Editor since late 2002 has been Geraldine Kennedy, a veteran political reporter and from 1987 to 1989 a Progressive Democrat TD. She refused to be interviewed for this article, but in public statements has avoided characterising the
newspaper as “liberal”. In her essay on the paper’s website, she writes: “We are prepared to champion specific causes, as we have always done, while recognising that these causes have changed over the last decade.”

So old-style liberalism has gone out with the Church it opposed, and if the Irish Times is not what it was, it is because Irish society isn’t either. Case closed. Right? Or are there more direct and distinct indications of a real shift, or even a drift, in the paper’s politics, beyond the fading of the ‘liberal agenda’?

Conor O’Clery, former correspondent in Moscow, Beijing, Washington and New York, probably the most distinguished Irish Times reporter of the last 20 years, says he believes there has been a real change. “I do think the Irish Times has moved to the right,” he says. “The most obvious symptom is the decision to devote part of the foreign-news pages to a neo-conservative opinion columnist from abroad, first Mark Steyn, now Charles Krauthammer, both apologists for George Bush.”

O’Clery’s successor in Moscow, Seamus Martin, who has also left the newspaper’s staff in recent years, agrees. “There’s definitely a drift to the right. Is it coterminous with Geraldine Kennedy’s editorship? Is it coincidental? I’m not sure. Papers take on characters without being pushed in that direction. It’s almost by osmosis.”

Only a handful of other present and former Times staff journalists I spoke to were willing to be named in this story, and none of the many who shared O’Clery and Martin’s view. One reporter said the shift to the right has to be seen in terms of a too-intimate relationship to power: “the Irish Times has become much more boring and less inclined to break stories, which I suppose means being less inclined to challenge society’s power centres.”

“There’s now more challenge to power coming from the Catholic Church than from the newspaper,” says another former staffer. “Vincent Browne wrote lately that the
Archbishop of Dublin is to the left of the Irish Labour Party. Well, the Archbishop is also to the left of the *Irish Times*.

Former *Irish Times* journalist and Labour senator John Horgan, now professor of journalism at Dublin City University, took a similar view on RTE Radio 1’s *Off the Shelf* programme recently: “I think the *Irish Times* is much more an establishment newspaper than it used to be, a much more consensus newspaper than it used to be.”

Another veteran cites the health service and police scandals as areas where the paper has fallen down, and like many critics, points to the appointment of Stephen Collins as political correspondent. “That is a sign of where Kennedy lies: Collins is so conservative, so unlikely to make waves against the powers that be.”

Collins, previously of the *Sunday Press* and *Sunday Tribune*, is one of Ireland’s most experienced, and well-liked, political correspondents. He has written a sympathetic history of the PDs and is thought to be close to Fine Gael. His appointment, along with that of the conservative Marc Coleman (an Irish Ferries admirer) as economics editor, is cited as evidence for a rightward move.

Some of the present staff, including those with a history of left-leaning sympathies, say it’s more complex. “Is it a liberal paper? I can’t look into my heart and say that,” one says. “But Collins and Coleman don’t indicate any deliberate policy.”

“Categories of left and right aren’t very helpful,” says another. “There are people in Fianna Fail with agendas more radical than people from the Labour party. And political correspondents tend to hold consensual, centrist views. The only wonder about Stephen Collins is that he didn’t come to the *Irish Times* long ago.”

“It’s simplistic to say it’s moved to the right,” says foreign editor Paddy Smyth, another with a history on the left. “It has never been a paper of the left or the right. It always had
a mix of views, and the balance has been broadly similar to what it is now.” All three of these journalists say that in as much as they contribute to opinion- and editorial-writing, their views have not been inhibited.

A colleague agrees, at least on Collins: “He was not hired for his right-wing views. And before Marc Coleman was hired, the economics-editor job was discussed with someone whose views are on the left.

“On the other hand, I think the leaders [the anonymous articles on the editorial page, taken to be the views of the Editor] are more to the right than before. One is conscious of a less-warm environment for views of the left. And as in any workplace, the boss has knee-jerk instincts and prejudices of which we’re all aware.”

“There has been a notable ideological shift,” says a former senior journalist with certainty. “I can’t think of a single policy point on which it differs from the Irish Independent.” Another former leading-light agrees. “For example, under Douglas Gageby or Conor Brady [Kennedy’s predecessors] I’m convinced the leader would have called for McDowell’s resignation after his recent outbursts. Instead he got a very light slap on the wrist. So I think the change is real. These things can happen without people realising.

“And it’s not so much what the paper is saying as what it’s not doing – like the massive ongoing story of the property scandal, with excessive uncontrolled lending and a market held up by belief. The ideology is the Emperor’s New Clothes, and the paper is ignoring it.”

However, even many of those concerned by the shift admit that it was “never a beacon of the left” (a phrase I heard repeatedly). Novelist and former Irish Times literary editor John Banville says: “It was always a conservative paper, as conservative as the barristers, businessmen and doctors who bought it. However, it had a knack of seeming radical, and
there was a time, 30 or so years ago, when radicalism was fashionable among such people.”

Mebh Ruane, formerly of the *Irish Times*, now with the *Irish Independent*, concurs. “I’ve also found it to be in the middle, with a very cautious editorial line. It’s burdened by its own image of being ‘liberal’. I didn’t find it particularly supportive during, say, the last abortion referendum campaign.”

Paddy Woodworth, author and expert on Spanish and Basque politics who worked as arts editor and on the foreign desk before leaving in 2002, says: “I don’t see any shift to the right under Kennedy’s editorship. You could argue about handling of particular incidents, like the Kevin Myers ‘bastard’ controversy, but the general tone of the editorials doesn’t differ a great deal from the Brady era.” Brady was editor from late 1986 to 2002, with Gageby preceding him in two long spells for more than two decades.

Freelance journalist Michael McCaughan, who has contributed to the *Irish Times* for almost two decades, mostly with articles from Latin America, says the paper “acts as a mirror for its ABC readers”, a demographic that he reckons has moved rightward. “We all know the *Irish Times* has shifted. But how do you quantify that, count the steps as if it’s a tango? I’ve seen innate conservatism and over-due respect for the business class all through my relationship with the paper. You can blast Coca-Cola’s behaviour in Guatemala. But you couldn’t do that for Irish companies, especially overseas.”

If the consensus is fuzzy among the paper’s journalists, its left-leaning readers seem more sure they have been abandoned. I’ve never heard the word “incontrovertibly” so often in answer to any question. “It’s obvious there’s a rightward swing,” an activist in her 30s says, “from the choice of contents for the letters page to the choice of new columnists and the boundaries of what the editor will accept from long-established ones. Anyone with half a brain could see it.”
But even where the theory has taken hold, there are cautions. “A year or two ago I thought there had been a shift, that the Examiner was overtaking it as a liberal paper,” says a worker in the area of minority rights. “But now I’m not sure. Certainly it’s continued to be good on issues that concern us, and been prepared to give good access.”

Green TD John Gormley also says things may not be quite so right-wing, citing “decent coverage” for anti-war activities as an example. But Greens, he says, have noted what they believe to be systematic avoidance in the Irish Times of criticism of genetically modified food. “People will say to me, ‘You’re not doing much to publicise that,’ and I have to say, ‘It’s not for want of trying’.”

Historian and anti-war activist Fintan Lane says: “It calls itself a ‘paper of record’, but over the years it has typically ignored radical groups and campaigns, and most of the protests they organise. It doesn’t take a brain surgeon to see what presses their buttons – get a gaggle of TDs or some celebrities on board and you’re in! I’m fairly certain that historians of the future will categorise it as a ‘paper of record’ for bourgeois Ireland and the political establishment.”

Conor McCarthy, a founder-member of the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, connects the question to wider trends: “As with the entire Irish political system, the Irish Times now cannot really question the Celtic Tiger/multinational FDI model of economic development. This eviscerates real political discussion. It is not the paper’s fault, but it shows no interest in thinking outside that box.”

Seamus Martin recalls: “In the mid-1980s, we ran a series by Maev-Ann Wren and John Stanley investigating the truth behind buying and selling property. Can you imagine that now?”
Eamonn Sweeney, a journalist with the Sunday Independent, sees the Irish Times’ changed character in its columnists, and beyond: “It’s strange to see Breda O’Brien, who came to prominence attacking the great States of Fear programme, in such a prominent position, especially when her output contains conservative nostrums about family and the direction of society backed up by research from American think-tanks. And John Waters has swung very hard to the right.

“There are two other insidious elements,” Sweeney says. “One is the post-Jivin’ at the Crossroads thing, of always presuming that any episode of bigotry down the country must be understood as some kind of culturally relativistic thing. I wonder sometimes if this is because the Times isn’t sure of its footing in rural Ireland. The coverage of the Nally case, surely a fairly open and shut example of KKK-style mores, was a particular nadir.

“Then there’s the weekend Times, especially the magazine, which grows more and more like a glossy at the height of the boom in Eighties Britain. That obsession with property and gadgetry – you wouldn’t need to be a hair-shirted ascetic to find it simultaneously vacuous and disturbing.”

Elsewhere at the Independent group the view is different. A senior journalist at the Irish Independent laughed of the notion that the Irish Times might have vacated valuable space on the left: “It’s still soft left of centre. I wonder are they being ironic they’re so po-faced about things. There’s no sense of the new Ireland, of the free market. When it comes to the crunch on Aer Lingus they’ll do all the traditional stuff, with Fintan O’Toole going on and on. Independent-group editors will make their decisions based on what sells – and what sells now in Ireland is McCreevyism and consumerism. If the Irish Times has moved, it’s been in the slipstream.” (In fact, shortly after this interview was conducted, the Irish Times editorially endorsed the Aer Lingus sale as the “correct course of action”, citing “commercial freedom” as a a great “intangible but positive factor” in the move.)
Conservative American-born Richard Delevan, business editor at the *Sunday Tribune*, says: “I’d say it’s always been a funny fish to categorise. I think it’s defined by its smugness, which is ideologically ecumenical. And, I daresay, its Protestant roots, which seemed liberal at a time when nationalist Catholic shibboleths were being overthrown.”

The P-word came up in interviews nearly as often as the L-word. “We had the ‘liberal agenda’ before anyone else because we were a Protestant paper,” says one former journalist. A famous extended correspondence on ‘the Liberal Ethos’ animated the paper some 55 years ago. But the notion that this commitment placed the paper in or around the socialist or social-democratic left is a misunderstanding.

So says Fintan O’Toole. “When was it a left-wing newspaper? The fact that the question arises tells us more about fuzzy notions of the left in Ireland than about the *Irish Times*. What was seen as a left-wing agenda was really a liberal social agenda. In the nature of the Irish left they came to be seen as the same thing.

“The *Irish Times* used the ‘liberal agenda’ as a crucial part of its identity,” O’Toole continues. “The circulation rose as the paper was seen to represent these issues. And it was powerful because it was embodied: all these young women writing it, living out a notion of how Irish society might change. It was helped enormously by the fact that it was regularly attacked by the Catholic bishops. This hid other things, notably the scant difference on economic issues and the national question between the *Irish Times* and mainstream Fianna Fail under Charles Haughey. Now much of what was perceived as the soft left-wing territory of the *Irish Times* has become mainstream.”

Michael Foley, lecturer in journalism at Dublin Institute of Technology, says: “The end of the ‘liberal agenda’ – a term I hate – has sort of left the *Irish Times* without a function.”
Into the breach, critics say, Kevin Myers and Mark Steyn have marched. “Off-the-wall columnists have become fashionable, but they’re all on the right,” Seamus Martin says. There is a widespread belief that Kevin Myers is more provocative, more often, than he was under previous editors, and not just about ‘bastards’. “He’s taken to writing hagiographies of Senator McCarthy and has an unhealthy obsession with the British army,” one reader says. “He wrote an offensive diatribe on Arthur Miller when he died. He has a weird fixation about lesbianism.”

“An Editor of the left would be more sensitive to what the right calls ‘political correctness’. Kennedy is certainly not PC herself,” says one insider. “Brady would have found a way to tone down Myers,” says another.

However, it was reported late in April that Myers had resigned. Word inside the paper says he was offended when he was left out of – indeed not even told about – the paper’s 1916 supplement, and after a ‘Diary’ of his was withdrawn due to legal concerns. However, as this article went to press, efforts were still being made to bring him back into the fold. Kennedy has made it clear that ‘stars’ such as Myers will not be eligible for the latest generous redundancy package. Myers, for his part, is believed to value in his unique ‘maverick’ role, as the unPC fly-in-the-ointment at an ostensibly PC paper, and indeed as a daily writer for the Irish elite’s daily paper. He would risk becoming just another voice in the crowd at, say, the Sunday Independent or Irish Daily Mail.

Canadian neo-conservative Mark Steyn was seen as an even greater provocation – “risible Fox News stuff, insult served up rather than analysis”, says Sweeney. After more than two years on the foreign pages, his column vanished earlier this year. Foreign editor Paddy Smyth declined to explain the change. Insiders told me, however, that Steyn submitted a column that was over-the-top even by his standards. When the paper decided
not to run it, they say, Steyn insisted he did not write articles to pass inspection but for
publication, and severed his weekly relationship.

Steyn was replaced by a syndicated column from Washington by Charles Krauthammer.
“He has his point of view, but he expresses it in a way more congruent with the Irish
Times mode of civilised discourse,” I was told.

“Krauthammer is much more dangerous than Steyn, because he is a policy intellectual,
and has a more moderate tone,” Conor McCarthy says. “I believe Krauthammer has
consulted on speeches for Bush – why does the Irish Times feel it is important to give
him a platform? I mean, the President of America can get heard whenever he likes!

“It seems a shame: why not give a column to a Russian writer? An Indian journalist? A
Black American? God help us all, why not an Arab journalist? In the Irish Times, when
it comes to pundits on the Middle East, we have the unfortunate situation where the
rightwing fanatics or fools write freely, happily and frequently on the region, while the
left-liberals do so rarely.”

If the Iraq War were a litmus test for the left, the Irish Times would register the slightest
trace of pale pink. The editorial line of the paper was against the invasion of Iraq without
UN mandate. But it was dully presented (e.g. “It is a great failure of politics and
diplomacy”) and didn’t colour the news coverage of the war in the way it did for some
British dailies. It rarely editorialised about the use of Shannon, but noted: “if our political
alignments are greater than the avowed principle of neutrality, perhaps this is the time to
confront and implement a new foreign policy.” By the time the war was ‘over’ an editorial
was praising Mary Harney for sticking to her guns over Shannon, showing “her
willingness to take tough and unpopular decisions when felt to be necessary”. It has never
supported US withdrawal from Iraq.
In late 2002 and 2003 the paper was obsessively concerned with deliberations at the UN – in keeping with the paper’s natural affinity with officialdom. It repeatedly praised Tony Blair – “a force for good”, said the London editor. John Waters memorably lauded “Mr Bush and Mr Blair” for “being principled, manly, Christian, resolved, and above all grown-up”.

Critics have pointed to the paper’s frosty leader treatment of the Rossport 5. But among domestic issues, immigration is perhaps the great litmus test. According to a colleague, the Editor is “conscious of the need for a multicultural side to the paper”. Michael Foley sees this as an opportunity for the paper to define itself: “It unashamedly pushed the liberal agenda in an earlier era. If it pushed multiculturalism, the debates could take place there in the knowledge that the paper doesn’t have a hidden agenda.”

However, at least one staffer believes there is a hidden agenda to the paper’s frequent coverage of immigrants. “There’s an undercurrent to that stuff. It’s not so much ‘let’s include everyone’ as ‘let’s keep an eye on these people’. ‘It’s nice to have Polish nannies rather than Africans, but do we really want them opening their own restaurants?’”

“It’s remarkable that though you have 700,000 ‘outsiders’ in Ireland, there is not a single ethnic-minority journalist on staff,” says a retired colleague. “You wouldn’t say a newspaper that wrote about women’s issues without women do the writing was particularly enlightened.”

However, many knowledgeable critics say the paper’s politics are most profoundly, if subtly, coloured by Kennedy’s own journalistic priorities. Says one: “She is obsessed with an old-fashioned idea of news, the predictive scoop: ‘The Government will announce tomorrow…’ To get those scoops, reporters are in thrall to ministers who give them leaks in return for soft coverage.”
A former colleague is more sharply critical: “Geraldine has a limited understanding of the role of a newspaper. She’s a newshound, and that influences her view. Conor [Brady] gave good scope to analytical writing, made the paper a more reflective place. Nowadays you’d read it in three minutes. Analysis is seen as a luxury.” On balance, says one veteran investigative journalist, “if you’re doing critical analysis of the powerful, you tend to find yourself on the left.”

An Indo journalist takes a more positive view: “Kennedy’s less tolerant of waffle than her predecessors.” Ex-colleagues recall her saying “we don’t need any more writey-roundy, thinky-thinky bits”. She has also tended to promote like-minded ‘newshounds’.

Kennedy’s team of journalists is much leaner than the one that proceeded the 2002 redundancies, and a further round of redundancies will shrink it again. “Specialists who might do deeper stories find themselves chasing news all day,” says a close observer. “Agenda-setting journalism is time-consuming. Health, for example, is always the politics of the latest atrocity. To get under that, you need to be taken out of daily news coverage.” A senior reporter chimes in: “With the specialists squeezed out, analytical writing tends to be reserved for a small group around the politics staff. This has the effect of narrowing perspectives.”

Kennedy is said to work under “constant siege” from the commercial side of the house, led by managing director Maeve Donovan. (Donovan was not available for interview.) “Their first object was to reduce the power of the Editor and status of the editorship,” says a colleague. Tension between commercial and editorial priorities often lurks in newspapers, even one owned by a trust. A notable feature of the Irish Times struggles is that they seem to have little to do with the integrity of the newspaper itself. Instead, there has been a series of corporate-style rows over status, over salaries, over who reports to whom. This spring, for example, journalists were being encouraged to vote to place the
canteen in the new offices on the top floor. Why? Because that would mean Maeve Donovan couldn’t put her office there and lord it over Kennedy on a lower level.

For many insiders, the paper’s straitened budgets have combined with the passage of time to change its character. Voluntary redundancies and early retirements since 2002 claimed Seamus Martin, Conor O’Clery, Paddy Woodworth, Nuala O Faolain, Padraig Yeats, Padraig O Morain, Mary Maher, Angela Long, Pat Comerford, even Harry Browne, among many other lefties and liberals. Michael Foley left before that. Dick Walsh, a powerful figure in terms of what appeared in the paper, died, and so did Mary Holland. Other important feminist voices in Christina Murphy and Mary Cummins passed away prematurely in the Nineties. Not all are household names, but many influenced the paper’s tone from editorial positions. Few or none of them can be said to represent the left-of-Labour politics (Sinn Fein, Greens, left-independents etc) that is increasingly popular in Dublin and elsewhere and absent in the Irish Times; but they do amount to a substantial social-democratic exodus, even allowing for some younger lefties around the place.

Fintan O’Toole says: “Most journalists of the Sixties and Seventies had left-informed views of social justice, and many of them gravitated to the Irish Times.” “The Sixties generation is gone, apart from a few stragglers,” adds a colleague. “Now society is quiescent, technocratic rather than apocalyptic. The new generation is pretty university-educated, middle-of-the-road, apolitical, while being able and talented. There are no Nell McCaffertys there.” O’Toole points out they are likelier now to come through journalism schools and from the comfortable classes: “Journalism is arguably one of the professions that has narrowed its social base.”

“Getting rid of so many people in one go has been damaging,” Foley says. “The institution’s collective or corporate sense of memory was disrupted.”
If this is true, it seems many readers haven’t noticed. Recent market research has been more positive than executives expected. It seems the paper’s key readers, middle-class, middle-aged, middle-of-the-road, are happy with its performance. Journalists of various stripes, however, talk about the paper’s “smugness”; its “incoherence”; its “lack of energy”; its astonishing capacity for impenetrably dull page-one headlines about the economy or the North; its increasing reliance – thanks to tight budgets and fatigue among largely unshuffled journalists – on PR to drive its arts and business coverage; its crass commercialism in much of the editorial content; its failure to evolve with the variety and directness of its British counterparts. Some see these characteristics politically, as ‘conservative’; others simply worry that such an uninspired paper won’t have anything to fall back on if and when the goose stops laying the golden eggs of property and recruitment advertising.

I contacted dozens of people for this story. Very few refused to talk. And fewer gave me a blank stare: the idea that the political posture of the Irish Times is a topic worth discussing, and writing about, made perfect sense to the middle-aged media types who dominated my list. It was clearly a topic to which many had given some thought. Most of the names in my notebook cannot be repeated here: they’re off the record. If their eagerness to talk says they think the Irish Times is important, their reluctance to criticise the paper attributably suggests they also think it’s influential. People inside and outside the paper seem to believe their careers and reputations are vulnerable to its power.

However, that power is worth interrogating. For every politician, publisher, theatre producer, marketing executive or magazine editor who trembles at the name of the Irish Times, there are thousands of others to whom it is meaningless. They’re not just the poor people and culchies who don’t figure in its demographic strategy. They include middle-class young people whose new-media lives are unlikely to include newspapers, especially dense, dull ones.
In Ireland 2006, a small cohort pays the bills for a ‘quality’ newspaper, with money to spare. But the *Irish Times* could eventually pay for its editorial choice of small-c conservatism. This might seem unduly bleak given that the paper’s circulation has risen in the last two decades from just over 80,000 to a bit short of 120,000. Similar newspapers in other parts of the world are seeing their circulations fall. However, as Conor Brady admits in his memoirs, the rise in circulation falls well short of the incredible demographic shift in Ireland during that time, with the number of people in the relatively affluent ABC1 categories doubling.

Certain factors should have triggered an explosion in newspaper reading, on pre-Nineties precedents. We got more urban, more educated, more likely to take a train or bus to work. We got a lot more disposable income. When you consider all the *Irish Press* readers turned loose a decade ago, the neglect of the top end of the Irish market by English papers, and the way the *Irish Independent* has stayed mid-market and even turned downward, the circulation performance of the *Irish Times* is positively disappointing.

I teach in the Dublin Institute of Technology’s Aungier Street building, the largest centre of the largest third-level institution in the State. There are nearly 3,000 full-time students in this ‘campus’ alone, most studying for business degrees, most of the rest studying media. This is *Irish Times* territory, mostly middle-class and hoping to be upwardly mobile. It is the most popular paper in the student-union shop, where it sells about 70 copies a day at the cut-price student rate of 70 cents. (It costs €1.60 in the real world.) Most of these, the manager tells me, are sold to staff, who save a nice 90 cents compared to their local newsagents. Perhaps 30 copies a day go to students – about 1 per cent of the potential market.

Sales rise when essay deadlines and exams approach: students know the *Irish Times* is the paper to quote to lecturers. The college’s computers also have free access to the
paper’s website, much of which is only available by subscription elsewhere. But the site, once pioneering, is so dry and unfriendly, with tiny images and no cross-referencing of articles, that students tend to ‘use’ it, especially for its archival material, rather than ‘read’ it.

“When I went to university,” says Michael Foley, “I bought the *Irish Times* partly for its symbolic value. I bought it to show people, ‘I’m in favour of what they’re in favour of.’” In an era that mostly eschews conspicuous political commitment, and in which the *Irish Times* isn’t coherently in favour of anything anyway, today’s students can see little reason to buy it at all.
Opening statement to Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss with the committee the role of the media, as part of the ‘context’ phase of its inquiry into the banking crisis. I understand from your invitation that you wish to discuss the following: the role in mainstream media for scepticism about the sustainability of the housing boom or the strength of the broader economy; potential conflicts of interest among media organisations; the promotion of property ownership over other forms of tenure; and the prevailing view that there would be a soft landing. In my opening statement I will address these in broad terms and am happy to explore them more specifically thereafter.

Print and broadcast media in Ireland played an immeasurable but almost-certainly significant role in the inflation of the property bubble and the legitimisation of risky behaviour by the financial-services sector in the lead-up to the crisis of 2007-08, and did so partly by ignoring or marginalising scepticism about these phenomena. I will focus in my statement on the newspaper industry, and I will argue that this socially destructive role should be understood not as a ‘failing’ of Irish newspapers but as a feature, one that flows predictably from commercial media’s structural relationship with the corporate forces that benefited from the bubble. While this relationship is of very long standing and continues, to some extent, to this day, I will further argue that there were certain aspects of the development of newspapers in the 1990s and early 2000s – particularly acute in

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1 submitted to committee 27 February 2015 in advance of appearance scheduled for 25 March 2015
Ireland but also experienced elsewhere in the world – that made them especially vulnerable to domination by those forces, and weakened the capacity of journalists to play the critical, adversarial, investigative role that most of them undoubtedly value.

Within journalism and in research about journalists, that value is often referred to as ‘professionalism’, a term that encompasses a set of principles and performances that supposedly drive journalists to seek the truth impartially and to question the powerful doggedly. Although Irish journalists, in my experience, have a healthy hesitancy to shout too loudly about such principles, I believe most of us (I still count myself as a journalist) espouse them honestly. There are captured in such largely symbolic documents as the National Union of Journalists’ code of conduct and the Code of Practice of Press Council of Ireland. I won’t romanticise the journalism of an earlier age, which had plenty of its own problems, many of them involving the limits and shortcomings of professionalism itself. However, over the last 30 years or so these principles are widely understood to be increasingly at risk all over the world, with particular features of the media landscape endangering them. As the leading American scholar of journalism Daniel Hallin has written: ‘For the most part I don't think journalistic professionalism is breaking down from the inside, by journalists becoming less committed to it; instead I think professionalism is being squeezed into increasingly smaller niches within the media field’ (Hallin 2006).

It is my contention that in Irish newspapers we can quite literally see that ‘squeeze’ occur over the period between about 1990 and 2007, as the physical construction of newspapers changed. There was an inscription of an unquestioning pro-business ideology and practice on to increasing large, advertising-heavy proportions of the newspaper – with ever-growing business/finance, property and lifestyle sections, dedicated to the advertising of, respectively, recruitment, real-estate and consumer goods and services. Even the most scrupulous of newspaper editors came to see those sections as a realm of,
at best, what you might call ‘Professionalism Lite’, where soft treatment of the rich and powerful was expected. Even if you worked in the niches where full-blown professionalism still held sway (the journalists who filled news pages and provided political coverage, for example) it was hard to miss the message embedded in that big, colourful product about your employer’s relationship to financial institutions, property interests and other corporate bodies. Those supplements were, after all, paying the bills. When Irish Times Ltd infamously paid €50 million for myhome.ie in 2006, it appeared to confirm its dedication to what increasingly looked like its core business: advertising property sales. This has obviously consequences, of course, for the newspaper’s capacity to deal impartially with subjects such as the desirability of property ownership over other forms of tenure, or the related question of the ‘soft landing’.

A group of Irish financial journalists, speaking on condition of anonymity to a team of academic researchers who published their findings in 2010, discussed this issue. One of them said: ‘Much of the mainstream media seems to me to be very conflicted because of their reliance on real-estate and recruitment advertising. That doesn’t mean reporters consciously avoid writing bad news stories, but it’s hard to run against the tide when everyone is getting rich.’ Another stated that journalists ‘were leaned on by their organisations not to talk down the banks [and the] property market because those organisations have a heavy reliance on property advertising’ (Fahy et al 2010: 15).

In 2006 I myself interviewed dozens of journalists about the direction of the Irish Times. One of them, retired from the paper, said: ‘In the mid-1980s... we had a series investigating the truth behind buying and selling property. Can you imagine that now?’ Even in the 1980s, he recalled, ‘[t]he commercial side of the paper [i.e. those who sold advertising] were in complaining like nobody’s business’ about the series; but the then-editor, Douglas Gageby, ‘stood up to them’.
The idea that certain, then-small parts of Irish newspapers were professionally compromised territory, however, was already in the air as early as the 1980s. A former business editor from Independent Newspapers recalled a lunch from that period where journalists and brokers gathered to mark the appoint of a new president of the Irish Stock Exchange:

The lunch went well and all the proprieties were observed, until, during the port, the topic of mutual dependence came up in the conversation. ‘What do you mean, mutual?’ a rubicund and slightly tipsy broker ventured. ‘The business pages are ours. We own them.’ .... Trudging back to the office... I admit an icy feeling was coursing through my veins. Maybe, the chap with the English public school accent was right. He was implying that we were lazy, dependent and largely uncritical. More chillingly still, maybe our employers (who shared the same gentlemen’s clubs with the brokers) were happy with such an arrangement. (Bourke 2008: 61-62, quoted in Fahy et al 2010: 7-8)

By the time of the Celtic Tiger, this compromised turf of business and financial journalism had expanded many times over both in the volume of pages produced and in the number of journalists employed. In that important and revealing research cited earlier, the authors summarise the views of several of the Irish financial journalists they interviewed:

According to Journalist F, because of the need for regular contact with financial sources, ‘some journalists are reluctant to be critical of companies because they fear they will not get information or access in the future’. Journalist E... believed that some journalists had become ‘far too close to their sources’: They viewed them as friends and allies and essentially became advocates for them. Their approach was justified editorially because many developers and bankers limited access to such an extent that it became seen to be better to write soft stories about them than to lose access. Extremely soft stories would be run to gain access too.... Journalist B criticised daily financial journalism for being ‘almost entirely press release and stock exchange disclosure based’.... Journalist F noted, it was ‘well known that some PR companies try to bully journalists by cutting off access or excluding journalists from briefings’. (Fahy et al 2010: 13, 14)

Many of the Irish journalists interviewed for that research said the business media here had become more adversarial since the crash. However, in research among British journalists in the aftermath of the financial crisis, a study found there was ‘no consensus
among financial and business journalists about their “watchdog” role in relation to markets and corporate behaviour’ (Tambini 2011: 158).

This sort of ambivalence, to put it kindly, about telling good, tough stories while maintaining source relationships is not unique to financial and property journalism. However, as the role and prominence of those sorts of journalism increased exponentially in the 1990s and early 2000s, their particular compromises of ‘professionalism’ played a proportionately much bigger role in newspaper coverage of these important areas of the economy and society. Their growth was not inevitable, nor was it unique to Ireland. It was part of an international development in the newspaper industry that sought to diversify papers’ content and appearance to make them more attractive to advertisers and (to a lesser extent) readers. In the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s this came to be known as ‘total newspapering’, with a de-emphasis on ‘news’ and – here’s the ‘total’ part – an effort to break down traditional barriers between editorial and commercial considerations (Underwood, 1993). Also known as ‘market-led journalism’, it was already worrying journalists cited in British research in the 1990s: ‘Among journalists there are fears that the delicate balance between the self-interest of capitalist media owners and the ‘public interest’ motives of journalism has been upset.... Some journalists have come to believe that the news is being stolen from them’ (Bromley 1997: 331). This market orientation does not express itself merely in the growth of financial and property journalism, but in the explosion of entertainment, lifestyle and consumer-oriented sections and stories. As one scholar summarises it:

When market orientation is high, journalism gives emphasis to what the audiences want to know at the expense of what they should know.... Audiences are not addressed in their role as citizens concerned with the social and political issues of the day but in their role as clients and consumers.... A journalistic orientation to the logic of the marketplace crystallizes in a journalistic culture that provides help, advice, guidance, and information about the management of self and everyday life.... The materialization of infotainment news and lifestyle journalism exemplifies this trend toward a blending of information with advice and guidance as well as with entertainment and relaxation. (Hanitzch 2007: 374)
These developments in newspapers did not, of course, happen by accident or in isolation. They were a vital cultural component of the larger global development of politics and economics over the last three or four decades that we have come to call neoliberalism. ‘Neoliberalization required both politically and economically the construction of a neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism’ (Harvey 2005: 42).

It is important to note that we shouldn’t blame most journalists individually or collectively for this situation. Nor have they been its obvious beneficiaries. Even in Ireland, where the booming economy helped newspaper circulation and profitability to remain healthy past the year 2000, a journalistic culture of increased workloads, casualisation, rapidly changing technological expectations and declining real rates of pay was in place throughout the industry even before the wider bust of 2007-08. When I interviewed newspaper journalists in 2006, many of them told me that their capacity to engage in critical scrutiny of government and business was overwhelmed by the day-to-day pressures of filling ever-more space in print and online: the old newsroom where reporters worked within fields of specialisation and might labour for days and weeks on stories before publishing anything had already changed beyond recognition. The job of careful consideration and analysis of events was largely left to a small coterie of editors and senior political writers, who generally rose to those posts through a combination of caution and conservatism. As research elsewhere has also suggested, journalists who continued to feel that they should be doing hard-hitting, critical scrutiny of powerful institutions felt disempowered from doing so. It is not surprising that a reputable transnational ‘scorecard’ of journalism’s coverage of the financial crisis found that in Ireland, most stories were episodic and short of analysis (Marron et al 2011). These conditions have, if anything, deteriorated further in the intervening years of collapsing
circulation and desperate digitisation: as one leading scholar has put it, the prevalent online-media practice is ‘encouraging journalists to rely more on a restricted pool of tried-and-tested news sources as a way of generating increased output. And in general, it is giving rise to a more office-bound, routine, and scissors-and-paste form of journalism’ (Curran 2011: 469).

Such conditions also provide the context for the increasing power of the public-relations (PR) industry. As noted above, the capacity of PR officers to give and withhold the information that hard-pressed journalists require in order to do their work gives them an inevitable influence over content, to the benefit of their state and corporate clients. An even more insidious form of PR influence comes in the form of ‘flak’, the negative attention and pressure that comes upon journalists when they attempt to report on sensitive stories. In theory, flak can come from any side of a story; in practice, most of it comes from the sides that can afford to generate it at a volume and with a social standing that catches the ear of editors. For most journalists with a busy job to do, this sort of thing becomes a good reason to ignore a story, or at least avoid its more ‘controversial’ elements. (See, e.g., Browne 2014.)

For reasons of space, and because it was not a specific part of the brief, I have not greatly addressed the question of media ownership in this statement, though I am happy to do so hereafter. The enormously high concentration of media ownership in this State is of course a major danger and fundamental public concern. As one academic analyst has written:

Even though there is now a plethora of media outlets, and citizens and civil society can publish media content more easily than ever, there is still an ever-increasing threat to pluralism given the domination of a limited number of organizations that control the flow of news and the contours of public debate (Fenton 2011: 70).
However, ownership of media cannot tell the whole story about them: the *Irish Times* is owned by a trust, but has not been immune to the commercial pressures discussed here. RTÉ is owned by the people of Ireland, but its role in broadcasting non-news-and-current-affairs-based ‘property porn’ in the Tiger years certainly bears scrutiny. On the other hand, the State broadcaster did some of the best work questioning the property bubble, and its journalists broke one of the big banking scandals of the late 1990s, about National Irish Bank’s Isle of Man accounts. It is worth noting, in fairness, that the *Sunday Independent*, and specifically a non-financial journalist there, broke another, about AIB’s allegedly non-resident accounts (Fahy et al 2010: 9).

The committee has asked me to address potential conflicts of interests among media organisations. Based on much of what I have said here, it is tempting to conclude that there was no real conflict of interest at all, but rather a congruence of interests between media organisations and the developers and financiers who were cashing-in handsomely on a speculative bubble. While there would be some truth in such a conclusion, it would also be excessively simplistic, because journalists, and the organisations that employ them, do also have an interest in producing strong stories that challenge conventional thinking and afflict the powerful. Indeed, nothing in what I have said here should be interpreted to mean that they do not sometimes do precisely that. The purpose of this analysis is not moral condemnation, but to understand why, in the specific context of Celtic Tiger Ireland and also beyond that context, the congruence might have been stronger and more influential than the conflict. While much of the professional practice of journalism is conducted with an acute awareness of ‘how it should be done’, nonetheless a plethora of other influences determine the shape and content of the journalistic product, leading to biases in favour of, e.g., ‘talking up’ the economy and the market, home ownership and the soft landing. How this happens is complex and contingent, located where newspapers find themselves, at an intersection of daily events,
longer-term history, commerce, design, technology, routine, process, pressure and, not least, economic and political power – an intersection traversed by the workers in a newspaper on a daily basis.

Works cited


Chapter 2.4
These People Protesting Might Not Be So Strident...

Coulter, C., H. Browne, R. Flynn, V. Hetherington, G. Titley “‘These people protesting might not be so strident if their own jobs were on the line’: Representations of the economic consequences of opposition to the Iraq war in the Irish national press’. Media War and Conflict 9: 113-136. (2016)
See appendix for co-authors’ statement.

Abstract
In this essay, we examine the ways in which the social movement in Ireland opposed to the Iraq war was represented in the national press. The article draws upon data generated by the largest research project of its type ever conducted in an Irish context. We considered representations of the anti-war movement in eleven daily and Sunday newspapers over a period of nine months. One of the principal threads that ran through newspaper coverage of the time centred upon concerns about the possible ‘economic consequences’ of opposing the war against Iraq. A close reading of the data reveals that the familiar reliance of journalists on official sources and interpretations ensured that the national press tended to cast the anti-war movement in Ireland as a danger to both the regional and national economy at a time of seemingly unprecedented prosperity.

Introduction
In the opening weeks of 2003, political debate across the globe was dominated by the imminent and seemingly inevitable invasion of Iraq by a ‘coalition of the willing’ led by the United States. Those powerful figures in Washington that sought to install the ‘new American century’ found their quest for hegemony increasingly challenged by the emergence of what the New York Times (Tyler, 2003) termed ‘the second superpower’ in the guise of ‘world public opinion’. The scale of opposition to the forthcoming war was made starkly apparent on a day of worldwide demonstrations that had been agreed at the
European Social Forum in Florence the previous November (Gillan et al, 2008: 113). On
15 February 2003 (or ‘F15’ as it became in activist shorthand), ‘over 10 million people’
(Seppälä, 2012: 1) marched in ‘at least 800 cities’ (Nineham, 2013: 29) in what was ‘the
most global protest in history’ (Gillan et al, 2008: 113). The unprecedented size and truly
worldwide nature of the movement against the Iraq war lends it a special and enduring
significance (Barbrook, 2007: 288; Seppälä, 2012). This has rarely been acknowledged,
however, in the academic studies of media coverage of the period. There have of course
been a host of valuable studies of how journalists reported the Iraq war published over
the last decade (Carruthers 2011; Miller 2004; Mirzoeff 2005; Tumber and Palmer 2004).
In the main, however, these have failed to provide focused or sustained accounts of how
the anti-war movement was mediated. Indeed, perhaps the sole exception to this rule is to
be found in the work of Robinson et al. (2010) who provide a sustained and finely detailed
analysis of how dissenting voices against the conflict were depicted in the British print
and broadcast media.

In view of the scale of the protests summoned by the invasion of Iraq, it is quite
remarkable that there have not been many more accounts of how the mainstream media
sought to depict the anti-war movement. This essay represents in part an attempt to
redress this glaring absence in the academic literature. The research that the article draws
upon documents media processes that played out in a very specific national context.
While the Irish Republic remains in principle a ‘neutral’ country, it did in fact make quite
a substantial material contribution to the drive to war against Iraq. The passage of tens of
thousands of American troops en route to the Persian Gulf through a small civilian airport
in the west of Ireland ensured that the country would have an especially large and vibrant
anti-war movement. The research that we set out below, therefore, not only provides one
of the few sustained accounts of how the media sought to deal with the competing
political interests associated with the invasion of Iraq but also offers the only examination
to date of how these processes unfolded in the specific context of what was, in spite of appearances to the contrary, a significant strategic site in the ‘war on terror’.

The project that gave rise to this article examined a wide range of ways in which the Irish national press sought to represent the emergence of a mass movement opposed to the invasion of Iraq. One of the more substantial debates that was played out in the print media centred on the potential ‘economic consequences’ for Ireland if it were to oppose this latest installment of the ‘war on terror.’ The discussions of the political economy of war that featured heavily in the Irish press have perhaps a significance that transcends this specific national context. The response of the print media to the emergence of an increasingly substantial and vibrant anti-war movement in Ireland varied enormously across publications and over time. While Irish newspapers were in the main deeply sympathetic to the enormous demonstration that filled central Dublin on 15 February 2003, the press tended to respond with universal hostility to more radical forms of protest and in particular to those that might offend the sensitivities of American corporate interests and, therefore, have ‘economic consequences.’ The preoccupation of the Irish print media with the political economy of opposing the Iraq war might be held to reveal its position within a broader network of political and economic interests both indigenous and external to Ireland. Without perhaps even meaning to, the anti-war movement posed certain searching questions of the model of national development that had been pursued in Ireland over the previous generation. In more specific terms, in casting light on the growing political subservience of the country to American interests, protestors threatened to draw greater attention to its deepening economic dependence. The challenge that the anti-war movement had come to represent to the dominant interests that drove the ‘Celtic Tiger’ was inevitably met with a chorus of powerful voices – political, corporate, media - that was channeled through the endeavours of the national press to depict peace protestors as willful egotists intent on banishing the first era of prosperity the country had
ever known. In these debates, therefore, we come to see rather more clearly than usual the very specific constellation of material and figurative power that defines the social world not only in Ireland but elsewhere.

The Irish Context

In his reflections on the carnage in the Persian Gulf, Slavoj Žižek (2005: 8) suggests that when, in the midst of the passions and controversies of the period, people spoke about Iraq they were, in fact, really talking about something, or somewhere, else entirely. The kernel of sense at the heart of this characteristically counter intuitive argument becomes readily apparent when we begin to examine the ways in which the debate about the Iraq war played out in an Irish context. On 22 March 2003 – forty-eight hours after hostilities had begun – the Evening Herald sought to gauge popular opinion on the invasion of Iraq among pedestrians in Dublin city centre. The most striking aspect of the various testimonies that featured in the ‘vox pop’ conducted by the tabloid newspaper was that while there were abundant references to the United States the proper noun ‘Iraq’ did not appear even once. It would seem then that when Irish people spoke about the Iraq war – even at a time when the debate about, and images of, the US led invasion were virtually inescapable - they were perhaps really talking about matters that had very little indeed to do with the Persian Gulf.

It often appeared that the advent of the ‘war on terror’ had initiated a prolonged and, at times, heated national conversation about the nature of Ireland’s relationship with the United States (Little, 2004). Traditionally, there have of course been strong cultural and familial connections between the two countries, with around 40 million Americans making claim to some version of Irish antecedence. Over the last two decades, these abiding affective ties have been mirrored in an increasingly substantial economic association between Ireland and the United States. The end of the Cold War heralded an
enormous wave of multinational capital, originating primarily in the United States, roving the globe in pursuit of fresh markets and enhanced profits (Henwood, 2005). In a European context, the principal beneficiary of this new generation of footloose capital was the Irish Republic. In per capita terms, Ireland received more new foreign direct investment than any other member state of the European Union, attracting three times more than its nearest competitor, the Netherlands (Smith, 2005: 38). Throughout the 1990s, the number of American multinationals operating in the Irish Republic grew exponentially and by the end of the decade two thirds of all investment in the country would owe its origins to the United States (O’Hearn 2003: 39). This influx of transnational capital was widely held to have been instrumental in sparking a period of seeming prosperity that was invariably designated by the metaphor of the ‘Celtic Tiger’. As the century turned, the Irish Republic was recording rates of economic growth that had no equivalent in the western world. One eminent historian sought to capture the reversal in Ireland’s material fortunes by suggesting that the erstwhile ‘carthorse’ had become a ‘thoroughbred’ (Lee, 1996). The scale of the transformation was offered more literal expression in the official statistics of the body that represents the interests of the world’s richest countries. In 2003, as the principal military power in the world prepared to wage war against impoverished Iraq, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that in terms of GDP per capita the Irish Republic had
become the fourth wealthiest state in the world (Smith, 2005: 38; Coulter, 2015: 4-5; Kuhling and Keohane, 2007: 1; Ó Riain, 2014: 34-5). ¹

The contribution that multinational capital had made to Ireland’s newfound national prosperity featured prominently in official discourse during the era of the Celtic Tiger. Key figures in the Irish political establishment were often at pains to underline that the investment and expertise of American corporations had allowed the Irish Republic to transcend its former, seemingly perennial status of economic underdevelopment and to become ‘a shining light and a beacon’ to other small countries in pursuit of prosperity (MacSharry and White, 2000: 360). While this was certainly the hegemonic narrative of the Celtic Tiger period, there also existed another, more critical but much less prevalent, reading of the course that Ireland was following (Coulter, 2003a). During the long years of the economic boom, there was a gnawing sense among some elements of Irish society that the growing economic dependence upon the United States had given rise to a particularly iniquitous form of political dependence as well (Devine, 2006; Tonra 2006: 181-196). While this particular source of unease remained largely latent when the widely revered figure of Bill Clinton was in the White House, it would become ever more prevalent and vocal when his widely unpopular successor assumed office. As the Bush administration escalated its plans to invade Iraq in the face of widespread international opposition, events in a small town in the west of Ireland would act as a lightning rod for

¹ It is worth noting that the estimation of countries’ economic performance is far from an exact science. The conventional index of GDP per capita is especially problematic in the context of small open economies in which transnational corporations are particularly prominent and it is likely that statistics such as those cited here will have overstated Ireland’s ‘real’ level of economic activity. That qualification having been made, the scale of Ireland’s economic revival during the Celtic Tiger period remains genuinely remarkable. Over the course of the boom, the work force doubled, the national debt fell to historically low levels and the traditional problem of involuntary emigration came to a halt. In view of these achievements, it was hardly surprising that Ireland was identified so frequently (and, it would transpire, so erroneously) as a role model for other relatively underdeveloped economies seeking to seize the opportunities of globalization.
the growing anxiety that the price of economic prosperity had been paid in the coin of national sovereignty.

The landing strip outside Shannon represents the first landfall for flights crossing the Atlantic, giving the facility a geopolitical significance that belies its status as a small regional airport. Over the course of several decades, troops from the United States and elsewhere have passed through the County Clare town on their way to bases and theatres of conflict rather farther afield. From the autumn of 2002, peace activists monitoring the airport began reporting an escalation in the already substantial volume of American military personnel and cargo arriving in Shannon. In the fifteen months that preceded the invasion of Iraq, there were more than 100,000 journeys through the facility by US troops, with almost 35,000 of these in the eleven weeks alone that preceded the onset of hostilities (Allen and Coulter, 2003: 8-9; Doris, 2007: 6). As reports and images of American soldiers passing time in Shannon airport began to circulate, the effective colonization by a foreign military of an ostensibly civilian airport became for some the most damning evidence that Ireland’s economic advances had come at the expense of its supposedly ‘traditional’ status as a ‘neutral’ state.

While the notion of neutrality has a profound resonance within Irish political culture, it remains a nebulous concept, meaning different, and often incompatible, things to different political constituencies (Tonra 2006, 153-80). The ideal of a ‘neutral’ Ireland is held dear by a spectrum of opinion that features advocates of something close to absolute political autarky at one pole and champions of participation in the nascent military structures of an enlarged Europe at the other. Between these is the most prevalent position on ‘neutrality’ that insists that Ireland should only participate in military operations that are sanctioned by the ‘surrogate’ (ibid: 180) of a United Nations mandate. The events that were unfolding both at Shannon and at the level of ‘the international community’ (Badiou 2006: 42) had the effect of blurring many of these political
distinctions, allowing those who often differed in their understanding of neutrality to find common cause. Those American troops who were stopping off on Irish soil were, after all, on their way to take part in a war that lacked the approval of the United Nations Security Council and hence was almost certainly in breach of international law. Against this backdrop, even those possessed of the least dogmatic understanding of what Irish foreign policy should be were likely to see events at Shannon airport as an infringement of the country’s neutrality.

The growing sense of anger nurtured by events at Shannon would be a pivotal factor in producing perhaps the largest social movement that Ireland has ever seen. As was the case elsewhere, the anti-war movement that emerged in an Irish context was ‘an uneasy alliance of remarkably diverse groups and individuals’ (Gillan et al 2008: 73). The most prominent organisation within this ‘movement of movements’ was the Irish Anti War Movement (IAWM), formed at a public meeting in Dublin two weeks after the atrocities that occurred in the United States on 11 September 2001. Like its analogue in the United Kingdom, the Stop the War Coalition (StWC) (Gillan et al 2008: 2, 83; Sinclair, 2013), the IAWM was, and remains, essentially controlled by the Socialist Workers Party (Browne, 2008: 47) but was nonetheless keen to build as broad a coalition of anti-war forces as possible. The organisation incorporated a range of political groupings on its steering committee and collaborated with other bodies such as the Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA), which has particularly close ties to the Irish Labour Party, and the NGO Peace Alliance, which articulates a range of voices from Irish civil society. These three groupings co-operated in organising the largest demonstration that Ireland had seen in a generation on 15 February 2003. While PANA and the NGO Peace Alliance were scheduled as co-sponsors of the event, it was the energy and personnel of the IAWM that were principally responsible for drawing more than 100,000 people on to the streets of Dublin on that cloudless early spring day.
The principal line of division within the ‘unity of opposites’ that was the anti war movement in Ireland was one familiar from other times and places (Gitlin, 1980: 58), reflecting divergent attitudes towards ‘(non violent) direct action’. The three organisations mentioned above essentially represented the ‘respectable’ face of anti-war opinion and tended to frown upon more radical forms of protest. Both PANA and the NGO Peace Alliance refused to envisage supporting ‘direct action’ in all circumstances for fear of association with anything that might be deemed ‘violent’. The IAWM adopted a somewhat more pragmatic position akin to that of its sister organisation in Britain, the StWC (Seppälä, 2012: 109, 142), and at times indicated a willingness to participate in more radical protests so long as they had a ‘mass’ character. Incidents of direct action by individuals or small groups, however, were typically dismissed as ‘divisive’ acts that endangered the building of the wide constituency of support deemed necessary to wield meaningful political influence.

While the mainstream of the anti-war opinion in Ireland was strenuously opposed to direct action, there were other elements within the movement that held to a rather different viewpoint. In numerical terms, the most substantial of these was the Grassroots Network Against War (GNAW), a coalition of anarchists that included members of the Workers’ Solidarity Movement. It was GNAW that called for people to come to Shannon airport on 1 March 2003 to tear down the perimeter fence and occupy the facility, a controversial moment that we will return to later. Those elements of the anti-war movement supportive of direct action also included a number of smaller groupings as well as individuals. On three separate occasions, activists expressed their opposition to what was happening in Shannon by targeting American military hardware located in the airport. On 4 September 2002, Eoin Dubsky painted the slogan ‘No War’ on a Hercules plane; on 28 January 2003, Mary Kelly took a hatchet to the nose of a US Navy aircraft; and on 3 February 2003, five individuals operating within the ‘Catholic Worker’ tradition adopted the name ‘the
Pitstop Ploughshares’ before inflicting more damage on the same Navy plane (Browne 2008). These last two actions in particular would become the source of considerable consternation within and beyond the political establishment and would, as we shall see later, have a great deal of bearing on mainstream political debate in Ireland as the prospect of the Iraq war loomed ever closer.

The emergence of an increasingly large and vibrant anti-war movement in Ireland posed considerable difficulties for the coalition government of the day, or at least for its principal constituent. The junior partners in government at the time were the now disbanded Progressive Democrats (PDs), a small ‘kingmaker’ party whose aggressively neoliberal agenda rendered them, in the words of their leader Mary Harney, rather closer to ‘Boston’ than to ‘Berlin’ (White, 2011). The expressly ‘Anglo-American’ politics (Tonra, 2006) of the PDs meant that the prospect of a war in Iraq posed few real dilemmas for them. It was always entirely inevitable that the party would offer unequivocal support for the invasion and in the weeks that preceded the onset of hostilities it was senior Progressive Democrats who would be most explicitly vehement among those who sought to denounce and deride the anti-war movement in Ireland. The position in which the more senior partner in government found itself was, in contrast, altogether more precarious.

The electoral appeal of Fianna Fáil had traditionally rested not least upon its insistence that Ireland exist as a sovereign and independent state. While the most successful political party in Irish history had moved sharply towards neoliberal economic policies in recent times, its politics remained defined in part by a version of populist nationalism signified in its claim to be ‘the Republican party’. The Republican credentials of Fianna Fáil were, however, at risk of being tarnished by the ongoing use of an Irish airport by a foreign military power that was happening on its watch. The hierarchy of the party would have been keenly aware both that opinion polls were finding that most Irish people were opposed to the US military using Shannon airport and to the prospective war against Iraq
and that these majorities would have included large numbers of their own supporters (Irish Political Studies, 2005: 52-6; Miller, 2005: 168-9). This realisation effectively ensured that *Fianna Fáil* had relatively little room for manoeuvre. On the one hand, the senior party of government could not afford to be seen to simply dismiss the demands of the anti-war movement for fear of electoral reprisals. On the other, it was loath to make concessions to the anti-war lobby for fear that it might endanger the political and economic benefits deemed to have flown from accommodating Washington’s interests. Inevitably, *Fianna Fáil* sought to square the circle of these incompatible ideological interests by resorting to the evasions and equivocations that were the signature of *An Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern’s period in office (Browne, 2008: 88).

Although senior figures in the Irish government would repeatedly state their hope that the crisis over Iraq would be resolved in a manner that both secured peace and respected the authority of the UN, all the while they were preparing the ground to facilitate the United States in its drive towards a war of questionable legality that would threaten the authority of the UN (Rees, 2004).

The prospect and advent of the Iraq war, therefore, summoned passions and divided opinion in Ireland as much as in most other countries. Although the Irish Republic was not a direct participant in the ‘coalition of the willing’, developments at Shannon airport ensured that debates in the state often had a particularly sharp edge and a distinctly national flavour (Coulter 2003b). Before examining how these debates were played out through the medium of the national press, we will outline briefly the original primary data upon which the discussion that follows will draw.

**The composition of the research**

This essay arises out of one of the most substantial research projects concerned with media coverage of social movements ever conducted in an Irish context. We set out to
consider how protests and protestors against the Iraq war were represented in the national press. In total, eleven Daily and Sunday newspapers were consulted, namely the *Daily Star, Evening Herald, Irish Examiner, Irish Independent, Irish Times, Ireland on Sunday, Sunday Business Post, Sunday Independent, Sunday Times, Sunday Tribune* and *Sunday World.* Our principal concern was to examine how the anti-war movement was depicted in what was offered as ‘hard news’ rather than subjective commentary. Hence, we included front page stories, home and world news, but not editorials, letters and opinion pieces. While the articles that we chose to consider were meant to represent the ‘objective’ reportage supposedly on offer in the ‘news’ sections of the eleven publications, it would transpire that some of the pieces that we examined would, as we will illustrate in due course, bear more than a passing resemblance to the kinds of polemic more commonly associated with the ‘opinion’ columns.

It was intended that the research would offer a sense of how media coverage evolved over that broad arc of time in which the Iraq war moved from being a possibility that consumed and divided world opinion to being a gruesome reality that continued to consume and divide world opinion. Accordingly, we examined the Irish newspapers we had selected over a period of nine months. The beginning of our time frame was 1 September 2002 and hence the research captured the escalation of the Iraq crisis that autumn, incorporating the first incidence of ‘direct action’ against US military hardware at Shannon airport and the publication of the ‘sexed up’ dossier that the Blair administration hoped would persuade the British public of the case for war (Robinson et al, 2010: 71-2). The final newspaper editions we consulted appeared on 31 May 2003 and therefore the scope of

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2 The Irish newspaper market features several British titles, including The Sunday Times featured here. While these newspapers typically produce an Irish version, they also contain content originally geared to a UK audience. It might be assumed that the very specific debates that unfolded in Ireland will have been shaped in part by the rather broader controversies of the British media landscape.
the project took in key events such as the declaration of ‘mission accomplished’ by President Bush and the subsequent disclosure by senior members of his administration of the actual, rather less than altruistic, reasons for the invasion of Iraq (Tumber and Palmer 2004: 126).

Each of the newspapers was read by the same member of the research team either in hard copy or on microfiche in the archives of the National Library in central Dublin. This painstaking work revealed a total of 505 articles that were concerned, in whole or in part, with the anti-war movement in Ireland. The significance of stories dealing with groups opposed to the Iraq war was reflected both in the sheer volume of articles, amounting to some 5344 paragraphs in total, and in their location within the newspapers analysed. Articles devoted to the anti-war movement appeared on 44 front pages, with 111 appearing in the first three pages, 159 in the first five pages and 245 in the first seven pages. Each of these stories was photocopied, scanned and saved as a permanent document format file for future reference. Individual articles were assigned an identification number and examined more closely to document the newspaper in which it appeared, the author(s), the initiating source(s), the page that it appeared on, the location it occupied within that page, the composition and sources of the headline, the length of the piece and so forth. All of the data was stored on an Access database, allowing the researchers to carry out finely detailed examination of the information as well as to conduct broader analysis of the relationships between a host of variables. At an early stage of the project, a close reading of the stories already gathered suggested that there were five principal themes that might guide the analysis of the considerable volume of information being generated, namely: the motivations ascribed by the media to protestors, the language employed to describe them, the motivations ascribed to the anti-war movement by official sources, the implications of violence associated with the protests and the economic consequences of resisting the American drive towards war. All of the
existing and subsequent newspaper articles were coded in terms of whether or not they touched upon these main threads running through the data. While the first four themes identified above will be explored elsewhere, this particular essay is concerned solely with the final one, that is, with the debates that for a time raged in Ireland about the potential economic consequences of resisting the American drive to war against Iraq.

The discussion of the political economy of the anti-war movement in Ireland that follows draws upon a substantial body of both quantitative and qualitative primary data. The finely detailed information garnered during the project allows us to discern numerical patterns in how Irish newspapers reported the controversies that attended the Iraq war. In particular, these data ensure that we are able to map out how press coverage unfolded over time and to identify the moments when discussion of the ‘economic consequences’ of peace activism became especially intense. This numerical information offers a broad context in which we turn to look more closely at what precisely the newspapers said at the time. In part, the evidence offered below entails a sequence of quotations from journalists assigned to cover the heated debates that were sparked by the Irish government’s seeming equivocation over the prospect of war against Iraq. It is customary when advancing qualitative data of this kind to offer certain qualifications that they should be taken to be ‘indicative’ rather than ‘representative.’ In this specific context, however, provisos of this kind are perhaps unnecessary. The very considerable data generated by this research project reveal that there were often very substantial variations in how different newspapers approached the anti-war movement. These distinctions tended to disappear, however, when the Irish press came to consider the official assertion that opposing the Iraq war would have severe ‘economic consequences.’ The quotations that are employed below to illustrate the media coverage of the day might be said then to be genuinely representative. Each could have been replaced by several other similar accounts from several other newspapers.
The political economy of opposing the Iraq War

One of the principal controversies that dominated Irish public debate in the era of the Iraq crisis centred on the potential consequences that opposing Washington might have for the newfound seeming prosperity of the nation. In the nine-month period that we examined, almost one fifth of the stories (99 out of a total of 505) concerned with the anti-war movement had an explicitly ‘economic dimension.’ These articles were not spread evenly over time but were, significantly, concentrated heavily in what was the most critical moment in the prolonged debate over Iraq, that when the balance of forces on either side the argument was most finely poised and there still seemed at least a possibility that war might be averted. Two thirds (67 of 99) of all of the publications dealing with economic themes appeared in a five-week span between late January and early March of 2003. If we look more closely still at this particular period of ever more frenetic political debate and activism, another even more specific and very telling pattern becomes apparent.

It would appear the issue of the fate of the Irish economy moved to the centre of a debate that was ostensibly concerned with the plight of Iraq precisely at those moments when elements of the anti-war movement transgressed what the political establishment designated as the permissible boundaries of protest – or, in other words, when they moved beyond what Hallin (1986) has termed the sphere of ‘legitimate controversy’. Over the course of the research, there were three clear spikes in stories concerned with the economic consequences of opposing the war and these coincided with the three actual or proposed incidents of direct action at Shannon airport that occurred when the debate over Iraq was at its height. There were 14 stories with an ‘economic’ dimension in the week after Mary Kelly damaged the nose of US Navy plane on January 28; 22 in the week that followed the attempts of the ‘Pitstop Ploughshares’ on 3 February to decommission the same aircraft; and 16 in the week either side of the 1 March demonstration called by the
Grassroots Network Against War that aimed to facilitate a mass incursion at the facility. In other words, more than half (52 of 99) of all the articles considering the economic repercussions of anti-war activism that appeared over a frame of forty two weeks were clustered in just three weeks that adjoined three separate moments of direct action. Each time that activists sought to move beyond the prescribed parameters of ‘respectable’ protest, official sources prompted a rash of pieces in the newspapers speculating on what snubbing the political wishes of Washington might mean for the health of the Celtic Tiger. While it may have been the actions of elements within the anti-war movement that, inadvertently, brought economic matters into the political controversies that attended the Iraq crisis, it would be other, rather more powerful, voices that would dominate these discussions.

It is has been documented in a wealth of research that the mainstream media invite their audience to understand radical social movements in particular ways by placing them within specific frames of meaning (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2008). According to Entman (1993: 56), to ‘frame’ is ‘to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation’. Research conducted over the last four decades suggests that journalists have with considerable regularity sought to trivialise, marginalise and even demonise radical forms of social protest (Gitlin, 1980: 27-8; Adler and Mitelman, 2004; Halloran et al 1970; McLoed and Detenber 1999). Indeed, the hostility of the conventional media toward social movements has been sufficiently prevalent and recurrent that Chan and Lee (1984) have suggested that it represents a ‘protest paradigm’. One of the media practices that is most recognisably paradigmatic is the propensity of journalists to foreground the opinions and interests of the political establishment (Dittmer and Parr, 2011; Tumber and Palmer, 2004: 103; Robinson at al, 2010: 152-8). In part, this pattern emerges out of
journalistic routines, as reporters seek to cultivate official figures that can provide quick and reliable access to information. The tendency for journalists to draw primarily upon ‘official sources’ was borne out strongly in the research that we conducted. In those articles that dealt with the political economy of the anti-war movement, it was representatives of the Irish state who were allowed to speak most often and at most length. Within these stories, official figures such as politicians and their spokespersons, Gardai (police officers) and representatives of the statutory airport authority at the time Aer Rianta were three times more likely than anti-war activists to have been the initiating sources (77 versus 25); four times more likely to have been quoted directly (43 versus 10); three times more likely to have initiated headlines (23 versus 8); and four times more likely to have been quoted in headlines (8 versus 2).

These data suggest that in the prolonged and often heated debates initiated by the Iraq crisis and played out in the national media, the Irish political establishment was allocated considerably more speaking time. The reliance of Irish journalists on official sources would inevitably prove to be both symptom and cause of the manner in which they would seek to ‘frame’ the anti-war movement. Key players within the coalition government were keen to promulgate the view that the anti-war movement amounted to little more than reckless egoists whose actions threatened economic ruin at both regional and national level. If we return to the newspapers published during the period, it becomes quickly apparent that the national press frequently invited their readers to perceive the anti-war movement through this specific, pejorative ‘frame’. In the discussion that follows, we examine the ways in which the print media in Ireland sought to cast the anti-war movement as a peril to both the regional and the national economy, addressing each of these levels in turn.
Anti-war protests and Shannon Airport

Those figures within the Irish political establishment that set out to contest the arguments of an increasingly vocal anti-war movement often sought to underline the importance of the US military to Shannon airport and to the wider regional economy of which it was, and remains, the hub. While these claims featured occasionally in the initial stages of the research that we carried out, they would become rather more numerous and insistent in the days after Mary Kelly and the Pitstop Ploughshares took direct action against the same American Navy plane parked at the facility (Browne, 2008: 99). In the wake of these incidents, many journalists were quick to reproduce official estimates of their likely cost to the Irish taxpayer. The assertion of a senior police officer that the bill for repairing the aircraft would amount to the suspiciously round figure of €500 000 remained entirely unsubstantiated throughout the period that we considered. This offered little deterrent, however, to journalists working in a range of Irish newspapers who recited the unverified statistic on no fewer than 21 separate occasions.

The coalition partners were at pains to underline that the anti-war protests would have broader economic consequences for Shannon airport that would dwarf the substantial cost to the public purse of repairing a single piece of US military hardware. In the wake of the actions carried out by Mary Kelly and the Pitstop Ploughshares, An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern was moved to dispense with his habitual evasions. The Fianna Fáil leader issued one of his most strongly worded attacks on the anti-war movement and offered perhaps his most explicit defence to date of the use of Shannon airport by the American military. Under the arresting headline ‘Cabinet set to approve use of Army to guard US planes’, the Irish Times in its edition of 4 February 2003 sought to communicate something of Ahern’s ire:

Sharply critical of the anti-war protesters, the Taoiseach, Mr Ahern, declared: "Maybe we were a bit over-tolerant of peaceful protesters, when they are not peaceful protesters, carrying hammers, lump hammers and pick-axe handles."
Refuelling of military and civilian aircraft provides 40 per cent of Shannon's revenues, he said. "There is a real danger that we would lose that. That would be devastating for Shannon."

The report carried in what was still often referred to at the time as the ‘national paper of record’ was more or less reproduced in the columns of its principal rival. On its front page on the same day, the Irish Independent observed:

In a strong reaction to the attack Mr Ahern said: “We see that maybe we have been a bit over tolerant with people protesting when they are not one bit peaceful”. These people, he said, were not engaged in peaceful protest and “we cannot tolerate that”. He said that refueling represented 40% of the business of Shannon. It was important for the area and there was a “real danger” of losing that business which would be “devastating”.

These twin articles illustrate well the manner in which Irish newspapers sought to handle the economic debates that attended the Iraq crisis. In the main, journalists tended to avoid explicit endorsements of the argument that anti-war protests would visit economic ruin on Shannon and its environs. There were some examples of this version of polemic – one of which we will encounter shortly – but in general they were rare. Most journalists tended to eschew the temptation to explicitly endorse official discourse on the economics of opposing the Iraq war and opted instead to simply record time and again the views of government figures and their spokespersons. This seemingly dispassionate reportage can of course be remarkably persuasive, inviting the reader as it does to embrace as matters of fact what are in reality matters merely of opinion (Phillips et al., 2010; Reavey, 2013).

The strident economic opinions of powerful political players that were documented by a range of journalists invariably turned out, it should be acknowledged, to be strikingly at variance with the facts. A critical illustration of this would be Bertie Ahern’s assertion – repeated on three separate occasions in the Irish Times alone – that refueling represented some 40% of business at Shannon. This was in effect a sleight of hand that invited the audience to draw a politically convenient inference, namely that because the American
military was refueling at Shannon it must, therefore, be the source of two fifths of turnover at the airport. The reality was, however, that the passage of US troops through the facility only provided a miniscule amount of its business. In 2002 as a whole, for instance, American military cargo represented 1.5% of all flights and American troops less than 3% of all passengers passing through Shannon. Journalists writing about the airport would – or at least should – have known that these were the real statistics mapping the economic profile of the airport because some of their own colleagues had reported them on several occasions previously (Evening Herald 4 September 2002; Irish Times 18 January 2003; Irish Independent 21 January 2003). And yet they continued to repeat the argument emanating from the political class that the withdrawal of American troops would decimate the economy of Shannon and its entire hinterland.

This propensity among Irish journalists becomes especially apparent when we turn to consider the titles produced by the most powerful news group in Ireland. On 21 January 2003, Eugene Hogan wrote a short piece in the Irish Independent in which he repeated information already in the public domain indicating that the contribution of the US military in the Shannon region was vastly smaller than often claimed in official discourse. This article would appear to have evaded the attention of one of his more high profile colleagues writing on the same issue for the sister Sunday newspaper. Less than a fortnight after Hogan’s article appeared, Brendan O’Connor turned his attention to a recent incident of direct action at Shannon. In one of the few examples in which a journalist broke from ostensibly straight reportage and offered an explicit enunciation of the official line on events at the airport, O’Connor informed readers of the 2 February 2003 edition of the Sunday Independent:

Mary Kelly could have cost Ireland much more than a €1 m with last Wednesday's action. She has also jeopardised what is a huge source of legitimate income for Shannon Airport. The US Navy and Air National Guard have been flying planes through Shannon for donkey's years. They pay the same fees as anyone else, they
buy lots of fuel and when there are overnight stops, as in the case of the VR 59th last Tuesday night, they provide valuable income for local hotels in the off-season. Like it or not, without these flights, Shannon would be practically deserted for more than six months of the year.

This closing assertion was sharply at odds with the simple facts of the matter. The passage of American troops represented less than 3% of the business of Shannon airport at the time and yet readers of the newspaper with the largest circulation in the country were being invited to believe that it was the US military that was responsible for keeping the place open from more than half the year. While the claims made about Shannon that were initiated by government politicians and reproduced by Irish journalists typically possessed little factual basis this did not prevent them securing a certain purchase on the popular imagination. One of the most insistent voices during the frequently heated debates about developments at the airport was Willie O’Dea, a senior Fianna Fáil politician representing the adjoining parliamentary constituency of Limerick city. This prominent public figure would regularly invoke a frame that is often employed by those seeking to marginalise radical social movements (Gitlin 1980). The Limerick politician contested time and again that protesters against the passage of American troops through Shannon were from elsewhere and hence unrepresentative of local opinion on the matter. O’Dea was at pains to underline a divergence between the interests of people living in that particular part of the west of Ireland and those of an anti-war movement that was based largely in Dublin. In the 8 February 2003 edition of the Irish Examiner, for instance, he was quoted as saying: ‘These people protesting might not be so strident if their own jobs were on the line’. The rhetorical device employed here is a familiar part of Irish political culture and seeks to capitalise upon the sense of many people living in the regions that the cultural and political elite in metropolitan Dublin does not have their interests at heart. Opinion polls conducted at the time would suggest that this enduring strategy might well have had an impact on popular opinion. It is telling perhaps that that
the only one of the four Irish provinces to record a majority in favour of the Iraq war in polls conducted before the invasion began was Munster, which includes Shannon and its environs (Irish Political Studies, 2005: 52).

That the argument that preventing the American military using Shannon airport would prove economically ruinous gained considerable ground in that particular locality was not entirely surprising of course. Rather more so perhaps was that some elements of the anti-war movement came to accept the logic, if not necessarily the conclusions, at the heart of official discourse in the period. The coalition partners had time and again insinuated that people in Ireland faced a simple, though difficult, choice between opposing the American drive to war and retaining thousands of jobs in the Shannon region. At a press conference reported in the Irish Examiner on 5 February 2003, a prominent member of Sinn Féin, one of the larger political parties opposed to the Iraq war, appeared to reproduce this essentially groundless binary. Aengus Ó Snodaigh was quoted as declaiming that ‘Irish neutrality and an independent foreign policy are being exchanged for 40% of the business at Shannon Airport’. The even more sobering reality was, of course, that if Ireland had indeed traded its political independence it had done so for an altogether more trifling sum.

**Anti-war protests and the Celtic Tiger**

Those political forces in Ireland that were sympathetic - in principle or in practice - to the ‘war on terror’ contested that opposing the Bush administration would spell economic disaster not only at regional level but at national level as well. Over the first five months of the period covered in our research, the debate about the economic consequences of anti-war protest centred almost exclusively on the issue of Shannon airport. In the early spring of 2003, however, the locus of these exchanges began to shift towards the national context. On 6 February 2003, three days after the Pitstop Ploughshares’ action against a US military aircraft stationed at Shannon, the first of a series of articles appeared in the
Irish press in which government figures insisted that the anti-war movement was placing the entire future of the Celtic Tiger in peril. Over the next two weeks, the volume of stories concerned with events at Shannon airport declined as the focus of debate on the economics of anti-war protest moved quite explicitly towards the national level. This shift was prompted in part by the enormous demonstration that brought Dublin to a standstill on 15 February 2003. In the flurry of ‘economic’ stories that appeared in the week that followed that dramatic illustration of popular opposition in Ireland to the looming invasion of Iraq, there was only one specifically concerned with Shannon.

In part, this transition reflected the strategic response of the state to the emergence of the anti-war movement as a potentially influential player in Irish political life. On 15 February 2003, the international day of protest against the prospective invasion of Iraq saw more than 100,000 people march against the war in Dublin (Miller, 2005: 170). The scale of the demonstration caught most political commentators – not to mention the organisers themselves – completely by surprise and gave the clearest indication thus far of the breadth of support for the anti-war movement among the Irish public (Little, 2004: 47). Mindful of the need to avoid alienating such a large swathe of the electorate, Bertie Ahern confirmed his status as an astute politician when he commented that he was ‘pleased’ that so many Irish people had turned out, demonstrating, he claimed, that they shared his commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Iraq crisis. These platitudes signaled the existence of a very brief period of grace before the political establishment began what appeared to be an intentional campaign to undermine the anti-war movement.

The harbingers of this explicit ideological assault were, inevitably, the avowedly pro-Washington figures at the helm of the Progressive Democrats. On 21 February 2003, the PD leader and Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) Mary Harney issued a caustic attack on those opposed to the ‘war on terror’ in a speech that included the first of what would become many allegations that peace protestors were motivated merely by the basest forms
of ‘anti-Americanism’. This address to a party meeting in Limerick would signal the beginning of a series of statements in which establishment figures sought to tarnish the credibility of an anti-war movement that was at the peak of its powers. One of the central concerns of these pronouncements focused upon the potential economic consequences were Ireland to fail to accommodate the interests of an American administration evidently committed to going to war against Iraq.

The discourse of those within government circles who sought to discredit the anti-war movement invariably engaged a simple, though often effective, rhetorical device. In speeches and statements, politicians would set out what were offered as two incontrovertible propositions: firstly, that the United States had played an indispensible part in Ireland’s remarkable economic renaissance and, secondly, that the United States would expect the full support of Ireland at this critical time of war. On most occasions, these statements were simply allowed to nestle beside one another without an explicit or causal link being drawn between them. The audience was simply invited to draw their own conclusions from a rhetorical association that clearly suggested that the existing field of political possibility offered a simple choice between continued prosperity and adherence to an ideal of political neutrality that was already compromised. What were offered as mere dispassionate statements of fact were easily rendered into the loaded rhetorical question that dominated Irish political discourse as the Iraq war loomed: ‘Would you trade your new found wealth for a political independence that may not even be possible?’

3 These allegations of ‘anti-Americanism’ were used frequently in denunciations of the anti-war movement but with little evidence in their support. Recent analysis of statistical data from the period suggests that the citizens of Ireland were, ironically, rather more favourably disposed to the United States and its foreign policy than the residents of most other European states (Lawson and Hudson, 2015).
The response of Irish newspapers to this particular strain of official discourse broadly echoed the manner in which they had responded to the claims about Shannon airport emanating from government circles only a few weeks earlier. There were, predictably, a few occasions on which journalists dispensed with their habitual claim to objectivity by making explicit and then endorsing the contention insinuated within the statements of the political establishment in this period. A case in point was an article in the 18 February 2003 edition of the *Irish Independent*, which featured in the ‘news’ section but bore all the hallmarks of an ‘op-ed’ piece. Three days after the anti-war movement had brought Dublin to a standstill, Sam Smyth gave voice to a claim that was increasingly prevalent but still mainly implicit within official discourse, namely that if Ireland were to snub the political wishes of Washington the economic consequences might be very grave indeed.

In an article entitled ‘Anti-war fervour could stymie our hi-tech industry’, Smyth made the following observations:

‘There are 580 US companies employing 90,000 people and investing €33bn here, that’s one fifth of the workforce and 70pc of all foreign investment – and US companies exports are worth more than €26bn. Some 100,000 people are employed in the hi-tech and technology industry in the Republic. Making the export of technology and components subject to anti-war sensitivities can do inestimable damage to the hi-tech industry that has made Ireland the envy of Europe’

Polemics of this kind would, however, prove to be rare. There were in fact only three specific occasions when ‘news’ stories dealing with the political economy of opposing the invasion of Iraq strayed explicitly into the realm of the ‘op-ed’ piece. On the whole, journalists contented themselves recording time and again and without comment the assertions of the political class that anti-war sentiment would bring economic ruin upon Ireland. At this point, we will provide three illustrations to give a flavour of the kinds of stories that became increasingly prevalent in the Irish press in the frenetic weeks that preceded the invasion of Iraq. The first article appeared in the *Sunday Times* the day after the enormous demonstration in Dublin on ‘F15’ and suggests that an Irish government
that was all the while expressing its hopes for a peaceful resolution of the Iraq crisis had already, some five weeks before hostilities began, decided to side with the aggressors:

A senior government source said it was still likely Ireland would back America in a war with Iraq even without a mandate from the security council. He pointed to Ireland's economic ties to America as one of the key factors contributing to policy on Iraq. The Irish government is currently in talks to attract up to six American firms to Ireland. Talks with one company are advanced, and an announcement could be made as early as next week, according to official sources.

The instrumentalist considerations aired here were echoed in a piece in the Irish Independent on the following weekend, 22 February 2003. In an article the headline of which speculated on ‘How 100,000 people turned Bertie [Ahern] into a dove’, Brian Dowling pondered the likely impact of the recent vast demonstration in Dublin on the field of political possibility in Ireland:

‘There are critical national interests at stake. One Government source described it as follows: “our biggest trading market is directly across the Atlantic, our second biggest market is across the Irish Sea, but our future lies in Europe. It sums up the dilemma neatly, yet even this is not the full story. IDA Ireland reckons the government foreign policy on Iraq, whatever it is, will not affect US investment. There are, however, 592 American companies in Ireland, investing over €40 billion. It cannot be totally ignored’.

In its edition the following day, the Sunday Times underlined further the economic interests strongly influencing the approach that the Irish political establishment was taking towards the Iraq crisis. Journalist Stephen O’Brien incorporated comments from the two most senior members of the government of the day:

The taoiseach outlined the kind of national interest considerations that had traditionally had an impact on our foreign policy: "There are 591 American companies in this country and total American investment in Ireland stands at over Euro 40 billion."

Mary Harney, the tanaiste, returned to the "national interest" theme at a PD lunch on Friday. "We are a European member state. We are an open trading country. Britain and America are among our closest friends. Let's keep it that way," she said.

The three articles cited above reflect the broad tendency of Irish journalists in this period to report without challenge the frequent pronouncements of the political establishment on
the likely economic consequences of widespread opposition to the Iraq war. The continual absence of any counterpoints to the views being reported did rather give the impression that the official discourse recounted in the national press represented thoroughly objective observations premised upon a balanced summary of the available data. At a time when alternative sources of information remained relatively limited, readers of Ireland’s mainstream newspapers could have been forgiven for believing that if the US military were refused access to Shannon airport, the outcome would have been swift retribution in the guise of the disinvestment of American multinational capital. There was, however, never any real prospect of such an eventuality.

The US companies that established or expanded branch plants in the era of the Celtic Tiger were motivated by a simple and self-evident instrumental imperative. The unusually low rate of corporation tax in Ireland created the conditions for multinationals operating in the country to register rates of profit far in excess of their undertakings elsewhere (Allen and O’Boyle 2013, 85). In 1998, for instance, a single Coca Cola branch plant in the County Louth town of Drogheda employing 200 people somehow managed to turn a profit equivalent to €500 million (Coulter, 2003a: 19). It would seem reasonable to suggest that these almost unparalleled fortunes weighed rather more heavily on the calculations of senior executives of American corporations in Ireland than any patriotic impulses engaged by debates about the presence of the US military at a small civilian airport in the west of the country. There was, in short, every reason to believe that American multinationals would, regardless of what happened at Shannon, simply continue to record vast profits at their Irish subsidiaries and ‘no credible evidence’ (Little, 2004: 227) that they might do otherwise. Nevertheless, the national press in Ireland persisted in publishing story after story initiated by establishment politicians and ‘official sources’ insisting that obstructing the United States in its drive to war would court economic catastrophe.
Almost none of these articles rehearsing the official line of the war, predictably, offered any balance in the form of a counterpoint from the anti-war movement (Gitlin, 1980: 188). In fact, there were only two fleeting occasions – both in the *Irish Times* (7 February 2003; 19 February 2003) - on which opponents of the Iraq war were given the opportunity to challenge briefly the recurrent association of a ‘neutral’ foreign policy and economic penury. Perhaps the voice that most convincingly challenged the government line in this respect was that, ironically, of someone from within official circles. In a significant article, *The Irish Independent* quoted Sean Dorgan – head of the Industrial Development Agency, the state body charged with attracting multinational corporations - who insisted that the controversies over the Iraq war would effect ‘absolutely no change’ in the level of foreign direct investment located in Ireland. This assertion was the first of its type to emerge from establishment circles and had, in principle, the potential to make a real impact on political debate in Ireland. The timing of their appearance, however, ensured that the IDA chief’s comments had little chance of being noticed at all. The relevant article in the *Irish Independent* was published on 20 March 2003, the same day that the war began. As tens of thousands of American troops who had only recently passed through a small and supposedly civilian Irish airport launched the invasion of Iraq, Sean Dorgan’s matter of fact demolition of one of the central arguments used to undermine Irish opposition to the war was consigned to the anonymity of a tiny article tucked away against the inner fold of page twelve of that day’s historic edition.

**Conclusion**

Simon Cottle (2008) has argued that analysing coverage of protest movements in recent years reveals “variable, shifting and sometimes more progressive alignments of the news media’s reporting of demonstrations and protests than in the past”. The validity of this observation was, *in broad terms*, borne out by the research we conducted on press
coverage of the anti-war movement in Ireland. The representations of anti-war protestors in the Irish national press often varied a great deal between newspapers and over time. As we will illustrate in other publications arising from this research project, the newspapers that dominate the market in Ireland often seemed keen to criticise or sideline anti-war groups. There were, however, times when at least elements of the Irish press corps appeared positively sympathetic to the movement. In particular, most of the Irish press – with the notable exception of the titles in the Independent group – chose to depict the 15 February 2003 demonstration in a positively glowing light. While journalists were often varied and occasionally positive in their coverage of the anti-war movement, these attributes disappeared more or less completely once they were prompted to consider the ‘economic consequences’ of protesting the Iraq war. In the main, Irish newspapers were content simply to record and repeat the official line that anti-war protestors represented a grave and reckless threat to the economic health of the nation.

The substance and sheer homogeneity of Irish newspapers’ response to the ‘economic issues’ prevalent within the wider debate on Iraq might be said to have a rather broader political significance in that they illuminate the very specific topography of power that characterises contemporary Irish society. The pathway to development that Ireland had come to follow as the Cold War drew to a close articulated above all the interests of a powerful network of players located within and without the country. Central to the success of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ was of course the arrival of principally American multinational corporations who employed their Irish branch plants to register astronomical profits and to launder those that had originated elsewhere (Mercille and Murphy 2015; Debt and Development Coalition 2015; Carswell et al 2013). The conviction that US capital was indispensible to the ‘economic miracle’ unfolding as the millennium turned ensured that the Irish political class became ever more anxious to court favour in Washington. While politicians on the right of the political spectrum tended to
be quite explicit in expressing their devotion to ‘Boston’ rather than ‘Berlin’ those on the
centre left – as the Wikileaks revelations would subsequently attest (Kerrigan 2011) –
were often no less keen to align themselves with presumed American interests as long as
it could be done behind closed doors. The media were also of course central to the
constellation of interests that sought to shape the direction and frame the representation
of the ‘Celtic Tiger’. Irish newspapers were indispensable to the construction of the master
narrative that the boom years would be endless and beneficial for all, a seemingly
dispassionate account that concealed the very substantial vested interests of the print
media in stoking in particular a property bubble that would in time prove utterly ruinous.4

It is perhaps fruitful to consider the manner in which the print media in Ireland
represented the ‘economic consequences’ of opposing the drive to war in Iraq against this
particular backdrop. Some of the issues raised by the anti-war movement posed, often
inadvertently, certain critical questions that were deeply inconvenient and troubling for
the specific constellation of powerful political and economic forces sketched above. The
defence of neutrality advanced by peace protestors led many to question rather more
critically the political dependence of Ireland on the United States and this in turn led some
to question rather more critically the economic dependence that lies at the heart of that
deeply asymmetrical relationship. In expressing their opposition to the Iraq war,
therefore, Irish peace activists asked some fundamental questions – without perhaps even
meaning to – that challenged the entire model of national development that defined the
Celtic Tiger era. Viewed in this particular light, the manner in which the Irish press chose

4 In the period of the Celtic Tiger, the property trade generated more advertising revenue
for Irish newspapers than all other sources combined. The proximity of the print media
in Ireland to the housing boom was illustrated most starkly in 2007 when the Irish Times
paid €50 million for the property website Myhome.ie (Donovan and Murphy, 2014: 159–
160).
to deal with the ‘economic issues’ arising out of the Iraq crisis becomes rather easier to understand.

When the anti-war movement in Ireland was held to merely represent the medium for a specific version of liberal moral unease, as it was on ‘F15’, it was often feted in the press. When anti-war protestors were regarded as representing a challenge to the essential political economy of the state, as they were much of the rest of the time, the response of the print media was rather less supportive. In those moments, the anti-war movement was deemed to have transgressed the boundaries of ‘legitimate controversy.’ The predictable response of the state and the media was to close ranks in defence of a particular, powerful set of indigenous and foreign interests, a reflex given form in their shared representation of protestors as recklessly endangering the national economy. This crucial alignment that was renewed during debates on the political economy of protesting the Iraq war tells us a great deal about the specific anatomy of political and cultural power that defined – and indeed continues to define – Ireland and elsewhere in the early twenty first century.

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Chapter 2.5
Where Will they Get the Fish?’


1

In the big courthouse just off the main street of Tralee, Co. Kerry, in front of just one spectator, José Francisco Santamaria and his trawler, the Monte San Roque, are getting bailed out.

A few days ago the ship was boarded and inspected by the Irish Navy nearly two hundred miles off Ireland’s south-west coast. It was catching monkfish, hake and prawns. The Navy watchers believed its actual fishing locations over the previous several days did not correspond with the entries in its logbook, and they took the vessel into port at Fenit, Co. Kerry.

European waters are not a free-for-all for fishing vessels, or at least they shouldn’t be. There are dozens of EU fishing ‘areas’, rectangles of varying size on the map of the sea, designated by a dizzying array of roman numerals and letters; fishermen are restricted in terms of which species they can catch, and in what quantities, in each. Off west Kerry and Cork, for example, areas VIIj and VIIk stretch south to the 48th parallel, roughly halfway to Spain, and within those areas about half the sole and plaice catch is restricted to Irish-flagged vessels, and Spanish boats have no quota for those species at all. Satellite tracking of vessels is one means by which national authorities monitor activities at sea, but the resources available for enforcement are widely acknowledged to be inadequate.

José Francisco Santamaria, an olive-skinned man in early middle age, is wearing a checked shirt and sports a Groucho Marx moustache-and-glasses combination. As
everyone awaits the judge, he is chatting to the heavily pregnant translator. A garda and a fisheries inspector are here too. The prosecuting solicitor, a local man, is engaged in an elaborate welcome-to-Kerry parley with the defence man, who has been sent up from Cork by the Spanish conglomerate that owns the _Monte San Roque_. Their conversation takes on the usual Gaelic-football inflection that governs interactions between men from those two counties. When sufficient niceties have been observed, the prosecutor mutters that, you know, the bail amount is about €175,000, based on a formula derived from the value of the catch.

‘I think 174,768,’ the defence solicitor replies. ‘And it should be in the account within the next half-hour, if it’s not there already.’

Once the judge arrives it’s a routine process, complete with a few moments of procedural confusion. Santamaria and his ship are free. An appearance in court is, it seems, a standard occupational hazard in the operations of Atlantic fishing, Spanish style. It may take years for this case to play out.

Two and a half years ago, in Truro, Cornwall, a crown court case against a Spanish skipper took a rather different turn. According to a story in the British industry paper _Fishing News_ in May 2006, José Fernández, aged 63, told the court: ‘If you wish to work in charge of a vessel sailing out of La Coruña, you can only do so if you are prepared to cheat.’ Fernandez said he had fished since 1976, and said it was ‘absolutely invariable’ for fishing firms in north-west Spain to demand that skippers ignore EU fishing laws. His British defence team said their enquiries in La Coruña suggested that the port authority and the auction houses were in on the act. Fernández’s trawler under-reported its landing of hake and claimed wrongly that most of the fish on board were unrestricted species.

An Irish fisheries official, who spoke to me on condition of anonymity, said the crime being committed over and over again in the seas off the coast of Ireland, as elsewhere,
could be summarized simply: ‘concentrated rape’. Why is this happening? The simplest explanation is that the demand for the commodity exceeds the legal supply, and so there is money to be made by breaking the law. European fishing fleets have a hungry market to feed. Indeed, in the early 1970s, as Ireland negotiated its entry to the EU, Irish fishermen were promised that a fish-loving continent was their guarantee of a profitable future. The people of Spain annually consume about 50 kilograms per head of fish and other seafood. That’s about six times more than the Irish do.

The Spanish fishing fleet contains thousands of ships. In Galicia alone the fish industry employs a quarter of a million people. One of the stories of Spain is the story of a fish-hungry people who have developed the means to feed themselves a kilo of fish a week, and for hundreds of years some of that fish has come from the waters of the European continental shelf that lies around the island of Ireland. When you visit Spain and dine in, say, Taberna Maceiras, a Galician-themed restaurant in Madrid, hundreds of miles from any sea, and you order the rich caldo gallego (fish stew) or the shellfish-studded paella, you are very likely to be enjoying creatures hauled from Irish waters.

Ireland’s fisheries, and their relationship to markets elsewhere in Europe, played an important role in this island’s pre-modern economic history. Medieval town charters, according to the marine historian John de Courcy Ireland, show that herring, salmon and fish in general are included in the items upon which the citizens of places like Dublin, Drogheda and Youghal are entitled to raise taxes for the maintenance of their fortifications. An Italian map of Ireland in 1339 reveals the existence of three fishing banks off the coast of Wicklow, while at the opening of the sixteenth century … another Italian map shows three fishing banks off Arklow, one outside Dublin and two in the vicinity of Ardglass … As early as 1437 salmon and herrings are found in the list of Irish exports, notably to Brabant (modern Belgium). ¹

¹ This and following quotes from John de Courcy Ireland, *Irish Sea Fisheries: A History*, 1981.
Fourteenth-century records show salt being shipped from Brittany to Donegal for curing herring. ‘By the fifteenth century,’ de Courcy Ireland writes, ‘the Irish sea fisheries were famous throughout western Europe and greedily coveted by foreigners.’ Local chieftains benefited from that covetousness, sometimes selectively: in the south-west it seems O’Sullivan Beare turned away English applicants for fishing rights along his coasts, doing a deal instead with Spaniards. And Irish ports and merchants were active in the business: a record from 1567 suggests Waterford was exporting fish to Galicia, Portugal, Andalucia and Biscay.

As England strengthened its grip on the island, such independent commercial relationships became difficult to sustain. By the early seventeenth century, London placed a tax on salmon, pilchards and herring exported from Ireland to places other than England. The Irish industry went into terminal decline, says de Courcy Ireland, ‘while French, Spanish, Scottish and English fishermen throve from fishing in our waters, and the government of the Netherlands was allowed special fishing rights here in return for paying £30,000 to the ever-impecunious Charles I’. Holland, then Europe’s commercial maritime nation par excellence, was keen to move beyond the herring-above, cod-below duopoly of its own seas and exploit the variety of Irish waters, especially salmon, hake, pilchards, ray, conger and ling – the last a source of valuable oil.

Ireland’s own fishing slumped to a subsistence level in a few coastal centres. The myth that Irish people neglected the seas during the Famine is corrected by figures from 1846 that suggest there were about 113,000 men and boys engaged in sea-fishing – 20,000 more than just a year earlier – on no fewer than 19,883 boats. They were, of course, very small boats, not capable of suddenly feeding an entire nation. De Courcy Ireland accuses Ireland’s leaders from the mid nineteenth century onwards, in London and Dublin, of a ‘trahison des clerces … turning their backs on the sea’. By the beginning of the Second World War, Ireland had ‘an insignificant fishing industry in a state of rapid decay’.
In the 1960s that began to change. Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), a state agency established in 1952 to encourage the development of the industry, began to get serious under what is universally regarded as the dynamic leadership of Brendan O’Kelly, promoting both fishing and fish-eating and prioritizing the development of several key ports. There was rapid growth by the early 1970s, but still the industry had barely entered adolescence, let alone maturity, when it had to deal with Ireland’s entry to the European Economic Community.

The seas near Ireland were still being fished by our European neighbours. Under existing agreements, some foreign fleets could fish to within three miles of the Irish coast; for the rest, the limit was set at twelve miles. The local view was that the Irish industry needed a substantial exclusive zone in order to prosper. But the Common Market had already decided, in 1970, on the principle of equal access to all waters. When, during the Brussels negotiations in 1972 for Ireland’s EEC accession, Brendan O’Kelly spoke up for a more restrictive system, foreign minister Patrick Hillery had him sent home. That moment represents, for fishermen, a betrayal of their interests that rankles to this day: the story is told again and again up and down Ireland’s coasts.

Joey Murrin, from Killybegs in Donegal, was one of twenty fishermen protesting outside the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin as those negotiations drew to a close. With so few protesting, and tens of thousands of farmers marching in enthusiastic support of EEC membership, he knew ‘we hadn’t a hope’ of convincing the government that Ireland’s seas should be kept for Irishmen to fish. A few years later Murrin found himself around a table with the minister for foreign affairs, Garret FitzGerald, as Ireland began to plan how it would negotiate its way into a new European ‘common fisheries policy’ that would go beyond the principle of shared seas and attempt to make a rational division of the stock, based at least in part on the existing catches of each national fleet. The meeting was abandoned after twenty minutes when FitzGerald discovered his civil servants didn’t
have adequate statistics. ‘We were unprepared, to say the least,’ Murrin recalls. Meanwhile, as John de Courcy Ireland writes, ‘People were beginning to realize, on newspapers at home and in the head offices of foreign fishing fleets, that the waters around Ireland held the only fishing grounds left in Europe which were not seriously overexploited.’

Brendan O’Kelly told the *Irish Times* in 1976 that a quota system would be unenforceable, and ‘might do great harm and might even be a disaster in some coastal areas’. He added: ‘All this is brought about because EEC countries destroyed their own waters by overfishing. They must not be allowed to destroy our fishing grounds too.’ O’Kelly’s preferred solution was the creation of an exclusive Irish fishing zone extending fifty miles from the coast. Incredibly, given EEC agreements, fisheries minister Paddy Donegan actually attempted to impose such a zone in 1977, but the plan was rapidly shot down in the European Court of Justice.

Meanwhile, the EEC extended the waters under its jurisdiction to 200 miles off the coasts of member states, from the previous twelve miles, and in 1983 the Common Fisheries Policy came into effect. Conservation of stocks was one aim of the new quota regime, alongside management of the market and of potential rivalry between nation states. At national level the quotas would be divided among regionally based producers’ organizations (POs). The POs would in turn divide those quotas among their member-skippers, each successive division carrying the weight of law: for a skipper, his annual letter from the PO is his licence to catch.

With 20 per cent of the EEC’s waters, Ireland got about 4 per cent of the overall catch. Joey Murrin describes this state of affairs with an analogy: ‘Imagine a farmer with a hundred good acres, but his neighbour comes in and farms it and takes away the produce.’ Another way of looking at it, though, is in terms of the Irish fishing fleet’s activity before
the advent of the Common Fisheries Policy: the 4 per cent quota allocated to Ireland represented an increase on the fleet’s actual share of the catch at the time. France – a major European power with a much larger fishing industry – got about a third of the overall EEC catch. Spain, though not yet part of the community, was given some rights based on its traditional fishing in waters belonging to EEC member states, including for species it didn’t traditionally catch, putting it in a position where it could, for example, swap blue-whiting quota for hake quota, a permissible transaction between states. After Spain joined the Common Market in 1986 its quotas were expanded; as the years went by Spanish companies bought up parts of the French-flagged fleet, and with them parts of the French quota.

The problem, in retrospect, was less the percentage breakdowns between states than the cumulative quotas of individual species. Member states had, naturally, tended to inflate their own statistics when they went into Common Fisheries Policy negotiations, with the result that the combined allowable catch of individual fish species exceeded the historical catch. Now those inflated numbers had the weight of law, with the implied directive: Go out and catch ’em.

2

The waterfront of Dingle, Co. Kerry, on a rainy day as the summer winds down, is a grim spot. On the pier a few tourists mill around, photographing the bronze statue of Fungi, the solitary dolphin that lives in Dingle Bay and has become one of the town’s main attractions. There appears to be nothing going on here that bears any resemblance to commercial fishing. The Dingle fleet is down to about seven boats; one burnt-out trawler has leaned against the pier for years now. Around here, the locals complain, there are
more fisheries inspectors than there are fishing vessels. In all of Spain, everyone repeats, there are just fifty fisheries inspectors, all based in Madrid.

Locals complain about the Spanish and the EU. But the real context for the decline of the fishing industry in Dingle, and in other Irish ports, is the rape of the seas, and the destruction to Irish fisheries is only a tiny element of the damage that has been done and remains to be done. Throughout the world, entire fishing regions have been depleted to the vanishing point – the disappearance of cod off Newfoundland, and the resulting destruction of centuries-old fishing communities, being perhaps the most famous example. An October report from the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Bank warned that the global fishing industry is unsustainable, with too many boats chasing too few fish; it also said the planet’s fishing fleet could be cut in half without reducing the overall catch. EU fisheries commissioner Joe Borg acknowledged in September that stock depletion in European waters was worse than the global average, and that the Common Fisheries Policy is part of the problem: ‘In its current form, the CFP does not encourage responsible behaviour by either fishermen or politicians … The management tools we use reward narrow-minded, short-term decision-making, which has now undermined the sustainability of our fisheries.’ The EU is now reviewing the CFP, and is contemplating rebuilding it around limits on fleet capacity, as measured in ‘kilowatt days’, as a more manageable and enforceable alternative to catch limits.

No one claims with a straight face that Irish fishermen have not been guilty of overfishing offences. But if the Spanish fleet has been committing concentrated rape, then Irish fishermen sees themselves as mere flashers. ‘There was a looseness in the industry,’ says Martin Howley, a member of the board of the Killybegs Fishermen’s Organisation (KFO) in Donegal. For years Irish boats fished over their quotas – quotas that, because of the scale of the industry and a shortage of inspectors, couldn’t be consistently enforced in ways that made them meaningful for conservation. Howley uses the past tense, but as
recently as September a fishmonger in the south of the country gave a wink and told me the cod he was selling was landed when the skipper knew the inspector wasn’t around. And with the confessions come the rationalizations: ‘One Dutch trawler discards more than we’re supposed to have overfished in a year,’ says Howley.

The annual process by which total catch allowances are recalculated is known mockingly as the ‘Christmas panto’. At a meeting every December in Brussels – one that invariably runs through the night – the science meets the politics, and more often than not the latter wins. The gathered ministers treat the scientific evidence about fish stocks as though it were the enemy’s initial negotiating position, not a statement of marine reality. Joey Murrin recalls a session in Brussels in the late 1990s. Fisheries minister Michael Woods woke him in the middle of the night with the good news: having hitched its boat to the powerful Dutch interest, Ireland was going to benefit from an overall 10 per cent increase in the total allowable catch of mackerel. Murrin asked the nonplussed minister: ‘Where will they get the fish?’ Murrin is contemptuous of what he calls ‘paper fish’, the extra 10 per cent here or 20 per cent there that are demanded by the industry and essentially invented by politicians to placate fishermen – but are not, in reality, capable of being fished in a manner consistent with conservation.

Whatever about the utility of the quotas as set, there is no doubt whatsoever that in the past five years the numbers of inspectors – a corps of professionals, employed by the state – and inspections in Ireland have increased dramatically. As offences have been discovered, the Garda have increasingly been brought into play. Irish boats are more likely to face inspection of their catches in Irish ports than the foreign boats that may be landing fish beside them, for the simple reason that locally based inspectors are more likely to be on top of Irish boats’ quotas.
In every fishing port in Ireland the theory thrives that a coterie of civil servants in Dublin is keen to get rid of Irish commercial fishing, leaving the waters to the big EU players and the Irish ports to pleasure-boaters and tourists. The recent Cawley Report on the industry puts it understatedly: ‘A poor working relationship exists between the industry and its policymakers.’

The conspiracy theory gets legs from the expense that those policymakers have gone to over the past decade in expanding the inspection regime, while the industry itself has been in decline. Martin Howley complains that there are twenty inspectors based in Killybegs, where, thanks to reduced quotas, the fleet is tied up on the piers from St Patrick’s Day to the second week of October. (The winter months are the best that remain for fishing the Killybegs staple, mackerel. And yes, that tie-up means inspectors and fishermen have little to do for half the year other than glare at each other.) Among the inspectors, he says, ‘you’ve got older guys who are ex-fishermen, but then you’ve also got younger guys who are looking for their stripes and rub people up the wrong way.’ When you’re trying to get a fresh product to market, the prospect of an inspector taking the time to pick through your boxes for banned species and to weigh each element of your catch is likely to be a bit of a bad-rub, all right, especially if you’re convinced that your bigger foreign counterparts are rarely subject to any equivalent trouble.

Howley cites Norway, which is not a member of the EU, as the best-practice model. ‘Norway has quality-control officers, not counters and weighers,’ Howley says. ‘They catch abuse, where it exists, by following the money, inspecting 10 per cent of the fleet each year, with a full audit.’ As a result, he says, ‘There’s no black[market] fishing in Norway.’

Meanwhile, Irish fishermen see Spanish and French boats fishing in spawning grounds for key species, feeding their domestic markets for small fish.
Some one hundred and fifty miles off the west coast of Ireland, where the sea on the continental shelf is no more than a couple of hundred metres deep, a dozen trawlers have lowered their nets, seeking demersal fish – those species that stay mostly near the bottom of these waters. (These are often called ‘whitefish’ and are the mainstay of the Irish industry other than in Killybegs, where the boats specialize in catching surface-dwelling ‘pelagic’ fish.) Right here it’s mostly hake, thousands of them spotted by the sonar on the boats above. Down near the sea bed the fish swim, their direction determining whether or not they will swim into a net and to their deaths.

The Irish boats are supposed to be using nets with a mesh no finer than 120 millimetres. Juvenile hake can dart between the weave of these nets and live to swim another day. But the Spanish and French boats have a derogation from the rules, based on the eating habits in their home countries, that allows them to use 100-millimetre mesh and catch some of the smaller fish. A few trawlers out here may even be using a still-finer mesh, 85 millimetres, catching everything that swims. Sometimes, if they are concerned about inspection at sea or in port, they will drop the too-fine nets to the sea floor when they have caught their fill, abandoning the evidence of their abuses and ready to show a set of legal nets in their place. Hundreds of kilometres of nets lie on the ocean bed here, wreaking further havoc on a marine environment already devastated by overfishing. To make matters worse, the vessels, having quickly scooped up tonnes of fish, often dump small ones overboard, where, being already dead, they re-enter the marine ecology as food for crabs instead of young fish with a reproductive future. Meanwhile, in their own waters further north and east, the Norwegians use 140-millimetre and 150-millimetre mesh. That’s what fishing for conservation looks like.
In his beautiful seafaring ballad ‘Shoals of Herring’, Ewan MacColl wrote of ‘the wild and wasteful ocean’, but of course the waste comes from above. The Celtic Sea, off the south coast of Ireland, used to be home to those shoals of herring. Donal O’Driscoll, who fishes from Dunmore East in Co. Waterford, recalls going up to a lookout-point one dark evening in the late 1950s and counting 113 foreign vessels fishing off the shore, just beyond the three-mile limit. ‘They were lit up at night, like a city laid out in the sea.’

Taoiseach Jack Lynch said in 1968 that there was herring enough in the Celtic Sea to feed all of Europe. He didn’t know what he was talking about: six years later the stocks were so depleted that herring fishing was banned there. The successive restrictions that have followed in more recent times, based on concerns about stock depletion as well as attendant ecological damage, notably on the where and how of fishing cod, tuna and salmon, have taken their toll on fishermen across the EU, not least in small Irish communities.

The tiny village of Brandon on the north side of the Dingle peninsula is one of Ireland’s genuine old-time fishing communities. Steve McDonagh writes that ‘a century ago as many as a hundred canoes used to fish from here, in addition to several larger craft, bringing in mackerel which were cured on the quays by women and children. The salted mackerel were sent in large quantities to North America …’ As recently as the late twentieth century Brandon was home to lucrative fishing within handy striking distance of shore.

Above Brandon Pier on a warm evening a retired skipper who prefers not to be named drains a pint of lager and recalls a more recent local boom-time, in the 1980s and ’90s, when the albacore tuna were thick in the water seventy miles off the coast, Ireland had a healthy 3,000-tonne quota and you could spend the summer hauling them in. (Another
man, a deckhand on other boats, told of getting paid in thick envelopes of untaxed cash in those glorious tuna days.)

‘You could land away,’ the skipper says. ‘It was open house.’

Then it stopped. The tuna quota didn’t vanish – in fact it grew. But the EU ban on netting tuna – in favour of a long-line technique that protects dolphins but that our fleet, unlike the Spanish, has never mastered – means Ireland actually lands less than 10 per cent of its tuna quota. Nowadays nothing is moving around Brandon Pier except a couple of lads drawing cheers from their pals with their leaps into the cold sea.

The abuse of the fishing environment has come so easily to fishermen. Indeed, sometimes it seems as thought it were the default position. Joey Murrin from Killybegs tells a sad tale: ‘Fifteen or twenty years ago I had an office in the KFO, and a radio beside my desk where I could listen to the fishermen. I’d hear them say the likes of: “I have sixty boxes – I might bring in six or seven boxes out of that.”’ The rest of the catch, small fish deemed not worth bringing in, but hauled up nonetheless in those convenient 85-millimetre nets, were tossed over the side, dead. ‘It’s going to take a long time to recover from that,’ Murrin says.

If most fishermen are, unlike Murrin, in a state of at least partial denial, then most consumers remain ignorant of the shocking extent to which the seas have been depleted. As the Guardian reported earlier this year:

When chef Rowley Leigh appeared on [BBC] Radio 4’s Food Programme last week singing the praises of the anchovy, he said the best specimens ‘came from the Cantabrian coast, that bit of the Bay of Biscay on the north Spanish coast’. But those fisheries have been closed for some years after overfishing.
Kenmare Bay, as well as being one of the most beautiful spots in Ireland, is also a rich marine environment. As Kieran Lyons stands at the back of a small motor boat, steering it across the glassy waters where the mountains of the Iveragh and Beara peninsulas are reflected, under a small stone bridge and away from the shore, he is confident that the plastic-mesh ‘pots’ piled up in front of him – each about three feet high and a foot in diameter – will fill with shrimp, again and again, as the autumn stretches away. Later he’ll worry about baiting them, then about hauling up the shrimp. Today, in August, is all about choosing the right spot and tossing the pots into the relatively shallow water, with lines and buoys attached so they can be drawn up later.

Apart from a few that he’ll throw into the car to bring home and share with his wife, none of Kieran’s shrimp will be eaten in Ireland. His is a small operation, but the good shellfish in these waters have not escaped the attention of Êire Nova, a subsidiary of the Spanish company Pesca Nova, which has a big factory operation on the outskirts of nearby Castletownbere. His shrimp will end up on Spanish tables.

He’s got six hundred pots out here. Pesca Nova will supply bait, then pay for his shrimp, and they’ll send a van to his landing spot to collect them. On a good day in the autumn Kieran and his partner can haul up more than 10kg of shrimp from a twenty-pot line. On a good day he’ll get to about fifteen of his lines. Last year, with Pesca Nova paying upwards of €11 per kilo, a good day meant grossing upwards of €1,500? ‘That’d be a good day. There’s plenty of bad ones.’ And this year the days have got worse: the market is poor, and Pesca Nova is insisting that Kieran sort through his pots, tossing back smaller shrimp. He knows that this makes sense in many ways, not least ecologically, but with the company now paying only €7 or €8 per kilo, he finds himself working harder and earning perhaps a third of what he made last year.
Despite the sheltered waters, there’s a buccaneering air about this fringe of the Irish seafood industry. Perhaps it’s the neighbours suspiciously watching from a nearly bluff to see where Kieran drops his pots: there are no clear turf rights out here, and it’s every man for himself. Kieran has a licence but his catch is not subject to any quota.

Whole sections of this bay are criss-crossed with mussel beds, where the shellfish are being farmed. Kieran steers his boat between lines of buoys and drops his pots nearby where he reckons the wild shrimp will be roaming to avail of the mussel farm’s juiced-up, nutrient-rich environment. The water is pretty healthy around here now – if the deliciousness of the mussels available at a shoreside pub is anything to go by. But it hasn’t always been that way. A couple of big metal rings mark the spot where salmon was farmed here some years ago. After a couple of poor seasons the salmon farming was abandoned, but not before the locals became worried about the possible damage to the food in these waters from sea-lice and the chemicals used to control them.

Fishermen believe the recent ban on drift-netting for salmon was inspired as much by the political clout of the leisured gentlemen who angle them out of Irish rivers, and of the tourism interests who attract them, as by concern for preservation of the species. Such tourism is not taken lightly by the Irish government, and commercial salmon fishing was never more than a part-time fishery for the low-clout inshore fleet, the men who would otherwise live most of their lives on land and perhaps catch some lobster. At Brandon Pier the men recall how they would abandon their turf-cutting for a thirty-day season of fifteen-hour days netting salmon.

The men are convinced the ban on drift-net fishing for salmon would be unnecessary if only there were a political tolerance for the necessary measures to get rid of seals. ‘Kill all the seals,’ is a frank policy recommendation from one. ‘Or give them the morning-after pill,’ suggests another. Seals are an annoyance in the shrimp game – they can
occasionally get into the pots – and they are worse with salmon. Kieran recalls, from his trawler days, nets full of chewed-up salmon, then some with only the head bitten off, then a few where a near-satiated seal had just nibbled off the skin, rendering the fish unfit for sale.

Salmon-farming needn’t make the mess that it did in Kenmare Bay. Marine Harvest, an Oslo-based company, controls close to half the Irish farmed-salmon market, with farms in Donegal for its ‘premium’ range – that’s the ordinary stuff – and at Clare Island in Mayo for the organic range. The differences between the two ranges relate to their feed and to the density of the fish in their cages. Like other farmed salmon, they are fed principally on fish-meal; although critics complain that this is a waste of fish, the industry says the meal is made from ‘bycatch’ that wouldn’t otherwise reach the human food chain – and that, moreover, salmon are far more efficient processors of feed than other farmed animals.

All of Marine Harvest’s fish earns the French Label Rouge, a quality mark originally created for poultry reared on pasture. The Mayo fish further qualify for the rigorous French organic standard, AB. The French connection is not an accident: French consumers, and costly French quality certifications, are at the heart of Marine Harvest’s marketing strategy. Irish consumers may continue to ask for ‘wild’ salmon, but elsewhere the word ‘Irish’ will do fine. This may have something to do with Ireland’s perhaps unjustified green image in foreign markets, in the ‘Ah, Kerrygold’ sense. French housewives may see the word ‘Irish’ and assume the salmon has been fished wild out of pristine Atlantic waters. In any case, Marine Harvest’s pursuit of quality marks has nothing to do with deceiving consumers, but rather with establishing that ‘Irish’ farmed salmon has some especially desirable qualities.
As another small motor boat weaves between large cages in Mulroy Bay off the shore of the Fanad peninsula near the northernmost tip of Donegal, hundreds of thousands of young fish are living up to the (possibly apocryphal) Latin origin of the word salmon – *salmo*, or leaper. Not only the water but the air above its surface is thick with pink-bellied fish throwing themselves around with crazed abandon. Two per cent of the volume of water in these ‘premium’ cages is fish flesh; to qualify as organic it would have to be half that density. These fish will never swim upriver – indeed, part of their unnatural life-cycle involves being shifted around in tanker-trucks – but there seems to be room in there for the creatures to express some part of their essential salmon-ness. Strong tides from the north Atlantic do much of the hygiene work, and also ensure the fishes’ muscles are toned to something like a desirable firmness. Another set of cages in nearby Lough Swilly lie fallow at the moment. Boosters insist that this sort of setting means that Irish farmed salmon is comparable to the wild stuff. And with nature doing so much of the work the costs are not prohibitive – just as well when consumers expect to buy salmon, like other food, at absurdly cheap prices.

Ireland produces as much farmed salmon in a year as Norway produces in a week. That, in turn, is a fraction of the overall aquaculture of China, which accounts for 70 per cent of the world’s farmed fish. In 2007 farmed fish constituted more than 40 per cent of global fish consumption, and there is no prospect of the small pockets of consumer resistance holding back the tide. The French EU presidency called in September for more EU development in this area – at present just 11 per cent of EU fish production is farmed, and this sector constitutes only 2.5 per cent (and falling) of global aquaculture.

But no one at the moment is pushing hard for very dramatic expansion in Ireland’s aquaculture industry, which has in fact contracted since its peak in 2002, hit by imports (salmon from Norway, mussels from Chile) as well as mismanagement and disease. There appears to be potential in rainbow trout and cod, and in shellfish: Ireland grows mussels
and oysters as fast as or faster than anywhere else in Europe. It’s a small industry, with perhaps 1,900 direct and indirect jobs, and the most ambitious talk is of maybe doubling that figure.

5

There’s a buzz about the waterfront in Castletownbere. Colin Farrell is in town making a Neil Jordan movie about a fisherman who thinks he’s caught a mermaid in his net. Tourists mill about hoping for a glimpse of someone famous, or they grab the ferry across the perfect little harbour to Bere Island.

But the buzz can’t hide the changes in the town’s economy. It’s not the same place it was, say, twelve years ago, when on the dreary main street that lies right beside the busy pier complex you could find a SuperValu that was among the best-stocked in Ireland, full of tasty luxury foods – handmade pastas, imported and artisanal cheeses, undreamed-of between here and Mount Merrion. The air of cosmpolitanism came not just from the many Spanish fishermen and their families who had settled here – they’re still around – but from all the money around the place. That was the 1990s, the boom time, when nets full of tuna and salmon supplemented the whitefish catches that might or might not stick strictly to their legal limits. Nowadays, the salmon and tuna are gone and, with stocks collapsing, whitefish quotas are both much reduced and much more tightly enforced for Irish vessels. The SuperValu is still there, but you’re lucky to find a block of cheddar in it. The new art gallery facing the pier suggests that hopes for the local economy lie in upmarket tourism rather than fish.

Donal O’Driscoll and his four brothers settled here in the 1950s, when there was just an old wooden pier. Castletownbere’s port is sheltered, and you can come and go at all tides.
In the early days the O’Driscolls didn’t go far: you could catch whiting, pollock, cod and hake within three miles of the shore. The Spanish would fish right up to the three-mile limit, mainly catching their beloved hake. There was little sense of competition – Ireland still hardly had an offshore fleet to speak of. But this place was a natural pick to be one of Ireland’s five main fishing ports when BIM set out its strategy for a brighter marine future.

There was no ice plant locally for years – they had to bring in ice from Cork – and the Spaniards didn’t land their catches at Castletownbere until the 1970s, when the pier was expanded. Nowadays, the main activity follows a peculiar rhythm: in a typical week O’Driscoll can look out his window between Thursday and Saturday and see as many as thirty Spanish-owned trawlers (sometimes French-flagged, five of them even Irish-flagged) come into the harbour, with, among other things, hake they’ve trawled and monkfish caught on long lines that can hook thousands of fish at a time. Most of the catch is loaded directly into refrigerated trucks that quickly hit the Cork road en route to Spain.

When Pesca Nova set up here in the early 1970s, the fisheries minister, Brian Lenihan, said it would bring 120 jobs. O’Driscoll says it never reached forty. The local Spaniards are well liked, he says; Spaniards crew on Irish vessels and no one takes exception, ‘and anyway a crewman has nothing to do with what his boss is doing’. But the town’s transformation from Irish fishing hub to Spanish transit point has hit like a winter storm. At the peak in the ’90s the local fishing co-op – the company, linked to the PO, that buys its members’ fish – had a membership of sixty. A private alternative, Fast Fish, had another ten to fifteen boats. That was more than seventy boats, sizeable trawlers of seventy to eighty feet in length. ‘Now there’s not a third of that,’ O’Driscoll says. And there is more decommissioning to come, this time a big tranche, officially subsidized and affecting most of the ports in Ireland: the industry is in the midst of negotiations that will
see half of Ireland’s whitefish fleet taken permanently out of action. (O’Driscoll’s own hope now is to get a bigger boat and move out of whitefish into winter pelagic fishing.)

Within the space of a single generation, the vicissitudes of the fishing industry have transformed Castletownbere from sleepy backwater to officially sanctioned magnet-port to post-industrial strip in need of prettification. An official who watched the catastrophe unfold says its latter stages got no attention in Dublin: ‘During the Celtic Tiger no one gave a shit about the decline of these communities.’

6

Killybegs, on the south-west coast of Co. Donegal, has a few architectural highlights, such as the big white house that overlooks the harbour and accommodates the KFO, but its air of spatial disorder makes it appear immune to prettification. Much of the town sprang up with the ad-hoc planning that marked the 1980s, when Killybegs was the centre of a virtual gold rush. Many of the big local fishermen came here from other parts of the country.

‘We had money when everyone else in Ireland was struggling,’ says Martin Howley, sitting in his office in the white house. ‘Factory workers were doing hundred-hour weeks.’

The fishermen of Killybegs essentially invented the Irish pelagic industry in the 1970s. ‘If we hadn’t, Ireland would have no pelagic quota,’ Howley boasts. Whereas Ireland didn’t have enough of a record in catching whitefish to stave off the French and Spanish, the rapid development of the Killybegs fleet meant the country had a pelagic catch to point to when the quotas were being shared out in Brussels for the Common Fisheries Policy in 1983. Ireland now has over 16 per cent of the EU pelagic quota, based on the
1983 share-out and on the variations in the total allowances for various species that have taken place since that time.

The Norwegian-built pelagic boats tied up in the harbour here are of a different order from the whitefish trawlers of the rest of Ireland. They are not for day-trips to the shoals; they are more like factories on the sea, with high-tech fish-targeting equipment and sluices that carry the fish, mackerel mostly, into refrigerated sea-water tanks below deck. Without such tanks, it seems, there is little point in landing pelagic fish, which otherwise get too damaged in transit. Twenty-one of the twenty-three boats in Ireland’s pelagic fleet are here. With quotas falling – mackerel down 50 per cent in the last five years – they are now out about one hundred days a year, of which perhaps thirty days actually involve nets in the water.

During the gold rush – the extraordinary confluence of supply, demand, improved fishing technology and then, for a time, ample quotas – Howley was away at sea for perhaps 330 days per year. ‘My kids grew up and I didn’t see them.’ It’s not surprising that family breakdown is a common Killybegs story.

Howley freely admits that none of the trawler owners came from local fishing stock: he himself came from Mayo. No, none of them are passing on the business to their children. Forget any romantic notions about fishing as a sacred inheritance. Around here it’s a flame that burned all too brightly for just one generation: the declining stocks and quotas mean the pier here is not the magnet it was.

But the flame hasn’t entirely burned out. There is widespread agreement that there is still a future for pelagic fishing in Ireland. Unlike with the whitefish fleet, there is no decommissioning scheme for Ireland’s pelagic fleet, and the fishermen aren’t demanding one. The species they fish – pelagic fish include herring, sardine, anchovy and mullet, but
around here it’s mostly mackerel – are surviving and there are hopes for their strong recovery.

In Donegal the main competition comes from Holland, the long-time EU leader in this field, and from non-EU states. Dutch-owned boats flying various flags catch probably half the EU pelagic quota. Dutch companies also dominate the wholesale market for pelagic fish: a lot of the fish caught and processed in Killybegs is bought by the Dutch. Dutch boats come here to the port and take processed mackerel away. (National quotas are irrelevant after the fish are landed.) There are five pelagic fish processors in Killybegs, but that is down from twelve just a few years ago.

The Dutch pelagic dominance does not spark the same resentment as the Spanish do with their massive whitefish role further south, partly because in the pelagic industry there are big non-EU players who must, it seems, be resisted. ‘We work with the Dutch, to fight Norway, the Faroes, Iceland,’ Howley says. Norway has successfully negotiated access to a quota of pelagic fish from EU waters, because some of the mackerel spawning areas are in Norwegian waters. ‘We get our share after Norway are appeased,’ Howley says. ‘They’ve managed their fisheries extremely well – but they’re a pain in the arse as far as we’re concerned.’

The main ambition for the Killybegs fleet and their EU counterparts is to get officials to increase their total allowable catch of mackerel. ‘Out at sea in recent times we have seen a huge resurgence of mackerel. We’ve got to wait for the science to catch up with the reality – but the lag is typically about three years. That’s too long whether the stocks are going up or down.’ (In November, after I talked with Howley, the EU fisheries commissioner acknowledged the ‘resurgence’ by proposing a significant increase in the mackerel catch, along with huge cuts in whitefish catches.) While fishermen’s livelihoods have not collapsed to the extent that they have in the whitefish fleet, and the Killybegs
skippers probably had some savings to fall back upon, fishermen here have seen their quotas halved, while fuel prices trebled and the price of fish stayed about the same. The equation speaks for itself.

The Killybegs fleet has also faced bureaucratic troubles other than the quota. Ten years ago the pelagic fleet here was under pressure from the EU for being too big, part of the bureaucrats’ nascent effort to endorse ‘effort management’ in the face of failure to enforce catch quotas. With political help from Dublin, Killybegs wiggled out of trouble – and history suggests the town carries more weight politically than other fishing ports. The elevation of Donegal TD Mary Coughlan as Tánaiste is welcomed here, while elsewhere in the country it is believed the county’s influence ensures that the focus of Garda overfishing investigations will be further south.

But Killybegs is perhaps most notorious for its bit part in the shameful story of European fishing off the west African coast.

‘I recall in 1994 we had a visitor to Ireland representing 19,000 Senegalese in-shore fishermen,’ Donal O’Driscoll says. ‘He came here to ask us to please ask our MEPs to stop EU money going to Senegal to buy fishing rights there.’ This seemingly strange tale of unwanted Third World ‘aid’ – the purchase of fishing rights from poor African countries has been accounted by the EU as aid spending, and is scarcely unique in its unhelpfulness to the recipient – is worth explaining. Countries such as Senegal and Mauritania get more from the EU fishery budget than Ireland does, money that goes to those nations’ governments in return for access by EU boats to the waters off their coasts – a potentially devastating exchange for local fisherfolk. That official arrangement opened the door to a well-documented culture of backhanders that saw many European boats exceed the agreed rules with the connivance of local officials.
An international anti-poverty NGO, Action Aid, released a report in 2008 on the terrible human effect of EU fishing policy in Senegal: ‘years of over-exploitation of fishing resources have seriously affected the food security of millions of Senegalese’, the charity writes. And plans for further bilateral agreements that include fisheries, and may involve local flags of convenience for European boats, could make things worse.

Some of the travails of African fishing communities at the hands of the big fishing powers would look familiar in Ireland, so there is some small irony in the fact that the poster-boat for EU excesses off the African coast was an Irish super-trawler, the Atlantic Dawn, hailed by the national media when it launched in 2000 as the world’s largest fishing vessel, 145 metres long, with a crew of a hundred. Taras Grescoe, in his book Bottomfeeder, choosing his comparison carefully, says the boat ‘is on the scale of a good-sized destroyer’.

Its owner, Kevin McHugh, moved to Killybegs in the 1970s after the Celtic Sea herring fishery closed down, and came to embody the Killybegs boom. McHugh was so eager a decade ago to get into Mauritanian waters that he commissioned a Norwegian shipyard to build Atlantic Dawn without having secured an EU fishing licence for it; this was problematic, given that it would be an Irish-flagged pelagic vessel and, as noted above, the Irish fleet was already oversized. After a chaotic birth full of bureaucratic manoeuvres (including the extraordinary decision by Irish fisheries minister Frank Fahey to skirt EU rules by registering this unparalleled fish-catching machine as a merchant vessel), it began to trawl African waters, bringing in more than three hundred tonnes of small fish a day.

‘A lot of people would have seen McHugh as wrong,’ Howley says. ‘If so, everybody else was wrong too. The EU opened the door in Africa for the sake of the Dutch, the Germans, the British to some extent. McHugh saw it open and he went for it.’
When McHugh conceived the idea of the *Atlantic Dawn* he thought it could spend some months fishing an Irish quota before heading for Africa. By the time it was built the Irish catch was too small for such a boat to be viable locally. So it had to confine itself to Africa, where it was merely the biggest vessel in an EU fleet of forty or more ships.

Even for the biggest fishing boat in the world, working as just one ship in far-flung international waters poses logistical challenges, and the *Atlantic Dawn* came under pressure from local authorities. In 2005, after a coup in Mauritania, it was apprehended and the operating company fined a quarter of a million US dollars. McHugh died, after a mysterious short illness, in 2006. His dream-turned-nightmare passed into Dutch hands and continues to ply African waters.

7

It’s another very windy autumn day in Howth, Co. Dublin, and while the old couples in their anoraks are braving the weather for a walk on the pier, the fishing boats are tied up. Still, the fish shops are full of fish – virtually none of it local, not much of it even Irish. Few things annoy Irish fishermen more than shops full of imported fish, especially the ones right here by the docks rubbing their noses in it. In Killybegs a little wooden trailer set up within fifty feet of the boats sells haddock from the Faroe Islands and cod from Iceland. In Cork’s English Market, the little stall of ‘Irish fish only’ is down to little other than smoked haddock, and looks rather pathetic next to the impressive heaps of largely imported fish on neighbouring slabs. In Dingle there is Norwegian salmon and Indian Ocean tuna, and locals complain that the crab-processing plant there was killed by cheap imports. All these species used to be fished easily from Irish waters, but Irish catches are now greatly reduced. And with those reductions, the economies of scale that once made
it worthwhile for Irish wholesalers and distributors to work with Irish producers no longer apply.

Nick Lynch, a fishmonger based up the road from Howth in Ashbourne, Co. Meath, says the fishermen just don’t get it. ‘Fishermen’s margins are being squeezed by costs, not by imports,’ he says, and imports are needed to maintain consumption in Ireland. ‘Customers are creatures of habit and want to be able to buy the same species. Restaurants need to be able to keep a particular fish on the menu. Consumers won’t just decide to eat a particular fish when fishermen have it available.’

The extent to which consumers really know what fish they’re eating is debatable. A New York Times story revealed last summer that, in a sample of sixty pieces of seafood bought in Manhattan, fully a quarter proved to be something other than what they were labelled once subjected to DNA testing.

A piece of sushi sold as the luxury treat white tuna turned out to be Mozambique tilapia, a much cheaper fish that is often raised by farming. Roe supposedly from flying fish was actually from smelt. Seven of nine samples that were called red snapper were mislabeled, and they turned out to be anything from Atlantic cod to Acadian redfish, an endangered species.

‘The Irish fishermen who complain don’t understand the processing and retailing end of the business,’ Lynch says; and some of the others don’t seem to particularly care about selling in Ireland. Lynch cites Marine Harvest as, until recently, one of the guilty parties in this respect, uninterested in Irish retail business. (This is a company that boasts of its ability to fly a salmon from an underwater cage in Mayo to a shop shelf in America within a couple of days.)
Martin Howley tends to agree that Irish fishermen aren’t getting the best out of their fish. The fairly smooth, mostly Dutch-run chain of commerce for mackerel doesn’t apply to whitefish, where ‘there is mismanagement of the stock between catch and sale: the gap is much too big’. Indeed, ‘mismanagement’ is a word that often springs to mind when considering the Irish fishing industry, with the Irish government sharing responsibility with the EU and fishermen themselves.

‘What you might call “Olympic fishing” is alive and well in ports around Ireland,’ says Richie Flynn, executive secretary of IFA Aquaculture. ‘There’s a peculiar “the most we can get as quickly as possible” attitude’: the temptation to gorge when the going is good is often irresistible. In Norway and Iceland, Murrin insists, the attitude is not the same. ‘I met an Icelandic fisherman getting off his boat with four boxes of cod. “That’s all?” I asked him. “I left the other four out there,” he said.’ It wasn’t a matter of discarding dead fish but of fishing only the largest cod, and only as many as he needed. The conservation mentality he observed in this fisherman – fishing only what he needed, thinking of the needs of the fish and their future – was, says Murrin, a consequence of his government’s conservation policy. ‘People will only treat the sea with the respect the government gives it.’

Murrin retired from the KFO in 1999 and speaks his mind freely. When the government set up the Cawley commission to report on the future of the industry, Murrin was one of the three wise men who sat on it. Their document, released in 2007, is a worthy compendium of aspiration, warning, and insistence on the need to cut back the Irish fleet.

‘The one thing every fisherman forgets about is the foundation of the industry: fish,’ Murrin says. ‘Shortage of fish is a real problem, and there is no conservation policy.’ Meanwhile, ‘unless the science is positive the fishermen never believe it’.
He traces the most recent phase of the tragedy of the seas to the Common Fisheries Policy. At the time it was enacted in 1983, the scientific evidence on fish stocks was poor. ‘The quotas bore no resemblance to what was in the sea,’ he says, and the misfit was an invitation to ignore the rules – not because the quotas were too low (they generally were the opposite of that) but because it was easy to caricature them as politically motivated and inflexible. When it comes to whitefish he is ‘absolutely and totally pessimistic’, he says. ‘You can’t be throwing 65 to 70 per cent of the catch over the side, dead fish, and hope to have an industry in the future … In 1979 there were twenty-five whitefish boats out of Killybegs making a living fishing Donegal Bay. There’s not one in it now. You don’t need to be a scientist to know what’s wrong.’

A start, he says, would be to ban the dumping of dead fish: boats should be required to bring home all the fish they catch. That would have two effects: scientists would have a more accurate account of what was being caught, and fishermen would be motivated not to catch more than they really wanted to carry home.

In any case, he says, it may be too late. ‘I was here when boats were fishing eleven months of the year. Now they’re not fishing eleven weeks. This is a European disaster. It needs a European solution. There’s more meetings now than there is fish. I’m not aware of any country in Europe with its fleet fishing in EU waters where they’re doing well.’

There is no doubt whatsoever in Murrin’s mind that half the Irish fleet needs to be decommissioned. But that’s only half a solution. ‘It’s the other half I’m concerned about.’
At Dundalk’s railway station, in a gulley overlooked by a brewery, the prettifiers have been in. Clarke Station, as it is officially called after the 1916 rebel leader Thomas Clarke, has a distinctly Tidy Towns feel to it: a dozen or so flowerpots hang along each platform; clean yellow bricks gleam in ‘heritage’ splendour; historical railway knick-knacks are on display in a museum that doubles as a waiting room between the tracks; poems and fragments of poems about train travel are stencilled or stuck on what seems like every available surface.

Over a white-painted portico, partly obscured by the overhanging brilliance of yellow daisies and red poppies, are these words: ‘You’ll never see the man again who sat across from you.’ Then, around the corner, on a shorter cornice: ‘Better to look away.’ Sometimes, here, there have been four or five police officers waiting on the platform when the train coming from Belfast, en route to Dublin, pulls in to the station. Wearing bright yellow tops with ‘Garda’ on them, but with no individual identification visible (it is not required outside Dublin), they walk along or through the carriages performing their duty for the state as ‘Immigration Officers’.

‘It would only take two or three minutes, though it might be a little longer if it was crowded, with a lot of people getting on a morning train,’ says an Iarnród Eireann employee at the station. ‘They were very efficient the way they did it.’ The process
appears to have been at its peak last winter, when virtually every train was checked and ‘maybe once a day people were taken off’, according to this regular if casual observer of the operation, a man whose main interest is seeing that the trains run on time.

Such efficiency – carrying out immigration checks on a couple of hundred metres of train in two to three minutes – demands selectivity. According to Superintendent M.P. Staunton from the Dundalk Garda station, in a letter to Belfast solicitor Maura Hutchinson, the police ‘cany out such checks on persons whom they suspected to be in breach of the relevant leagal ([sic]) provisions’. He denied that officers ‘select people on the basis of the colour of their skin’, and added: ‘our record clearly shows that a very high proportion of those persons stopped and checked are in fact found to be in breach of those provisions’.

2

Maura Hutchinson is one of several people who have complained about events they witnessed in Clarke Station from their seats aboard the Belfast-to-Dublin train. On 7 February she was travelling to attend a meeting about immigration law when she saw such law in action. ‘We were in Dundalk and there was a prolonged stop. I heard raised voices behind me, and mentions of “Ireland” and “Southern Ireland”. I thought perhaps there were tourists who were a bit lost.

‘When we were pulling off, there was an announcement apologizing for the delay and saying it was due to immigration control. I looked out the window and saw three or four officers leading two men away. I hadn’t seen the officers previously – they didn’t even walk up and down the length of the train. They certainly asked no one in our carriage if they had correct immigration clearance to enter the Republic of Ireland.’
Hutchinson took her complaint about the incident directly to the Garda Síochána. She wrote to the Garda station in Dundalk: ‘I am deeply concerned at the way in which this is taking place; these men were identified purely due to the colour of their skin, which is clearly discriminatory and would appear to be an arbitrary abuse of your powers.’

Brendan Fanning, a dentist from Ashford, Co. Wicklow, was returning from a conference in Belfast on the morning of 4 May. ‘Two big guys came in, one of them with that psychedelic yellow pull-over, and roared something about passports and identification papers. They asked one group of guys where they came from – “Belfast”, right. Then they got into a conversation with another passenger. I heard him say, “I have it in my bag”. Then I heard one of the guards say, “Well, if you have, you can get the next train”. As we pulled away from the station I saw five black guys left huddled in a corner of the platform. I tell you, at that point the conversation in the carriage went instantly from nil to “Ireland of the Welcomes”. Mind you, if you were white and an illegal immigrant you’d have had no problem on that train.’

Seamus Dooley, Irish Secretary for the National Union of Journalists, travelled south on the same day. In his carriage there was plenty of conversation before they reached Dundalk: young, obviously foreign, white-skinned tourists sat across from him, chatting about queueing for the Queen Mother’s funeral. A few seats away, six or seven young black students also appeared in ‘lively, chatty’ form, Dooley says.

‘One garda boarded the carriage at Dundalk, and passed us without a glance.’ He went straight to the black students and commenced what Dooley calls a ‘hostile grilling’. ‘The men said they had been in Belfast for the day. The garda said: “You’re entering a foreign country, and when you move from one country to another you should have passports.” He asked them for identification, but at no stage did he present identification. There was no explanation as to what the checks are, no “We’re carrying out routine inspections”. He
never explained: “This is what we’re looking for”.’ The men were allowed to remain on the train and, in contrast to Brendan Fanning’s carriage, ‘silence descended’. ‘What do you do? What do you say? “Sorry for your troubles”?’ The young white American tourist sitting opposite Dooley was ‘genuinely shocked and disturbed’, Dooley says, not least because he himself had been entirely overlooked by the inspection.

‘Such checks fly in the face of the Good Friday Agreement – passports to travel to Northern Ireland, security checks at Dundalk,’ Seamus Dooley says. If immigration controls are to be carried out at the Irish border, says Dooley, they need to be done fairly, without the strong whiff of ‘racial profiling’ that has hung over them. ‘If it is official state policy that those travelling by rail should carry identification, we should be told and it should apply to everyone. It’s not enough to leave it to a garda’s hunch.’

Selective immigration checks at the border have not been confined to rail passengers. ‘Sue’, a white New Zealander living in Ireland who prefers to remain anonymous, is a frequent cross-border bus passenger. On one occasion last year she was travelling south, with a great pile of belongings and without a passport. She said as much to a garda who was doing a ‘cursory’ document check. ‘He said, “We’ll see about that,” then he went to the back of the bus to join a colleague who was questioning a black passenger.’ The black man was removed; Sue faced no further questions.

There is a place just up the road, outside Newry, that was the scene of border controls truly worthy of the name until a few years ago. Each car that came along the road was forced into a narrow, heavily fortified side lane, and nervous-looking British squaddies aimed their automatic weapons in every direction. When you passed through the Newry
checkpoint during tense times, it was always possible to spot at least one weapon pointed at you.

Today the checkpoint is a faint memory on the landscape, blocked off by crumbling bollards, overgrown with grass and wildflowers, easily missed entirely, but also virtually the only landmark to remind an observant, historically minded visitor that somewhere along this stretch of road there is a change of jurisdiction.

In both jurisdictions, ‘cracking down’ on immigrants, be they dark-skinned or of eastern European origin, is regarded as smart politics – with a potential only partly masked by an all-party ‘anti-racism protocol’ that essentially kept immigration off the short-term agenda during the last general election in the Republic. Once the election was out of the way, the new Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell, put ‘illegal immigration’ at the forefront of publicity and of policy. The most dramatic expression of this was Operation Hyphen: on 16 and 23 July a total of five hundred gardaí, under the direction of the Garda National Immigration Bureau, carried out raids around the country. What were they looking for? The bureau cited a figure of 2,600 people ‘evading deportation orders’, and most media were happy to repeat it. As a count of the number of cases still on the books, it was doubtless accurate; as an estimate of the true number of such would-be deportees in the country, it was a large exaggeration, as a Garda spokesman was happy to admit to me. Immigration lawyer Derek Stewart told me that, at a conservative estimate, at least half that number had already ‘abandoned the jurisdiction’.

Operation Hyphen resulted in the arrest of only fifteen people who were subject to deportation orders. A further 125 people were taken into custody, in many cases for upwards of a week, because of problems with documentation. As a means of communicating aggressively to immigrants and would-be immigrants that the state was getting tougher, this may have been effective. As a media exercise, in which an image
emerged of inpenetrable warrens of illegals (Garda spokesmen always referred to ‘premises’ being raided rather than ‘homes’), it certainly made a powerful point, with the help of loose talk about the phantom 2,600.

McDowell’s own role was more explicit on other immigration matters. He announced in July that he was preparing to amend, if necessary, the state’s citizenship laws ‘to make it clear that persons who are born in Ireland, and acquire Irish citizenship rights as a consequence, don’t confer on their parents a semi-formal right of residence’. Even while a case along these lines was before the Supreme Court, the Minister was using the summer media lull to boost his get-tough image, and the Sunday Independent duly reported that he was moving to end the ‘loophole’ and ‘scam’ whereby a group of Irish citizens – Irish-born children of foreign parents – are allowed to remain in the country with those parents. (So much for ‘cherishing all the children of the nation equally’, words from the Proclamation of the Irish Republic on which Thomas Clarke’s is the first name.) It is in this crackdown context that over the past five years a border that was meant to be fading away, and a rail line that carried campaigning condom-smugglers three decades ago, have become the setting for a new, highly selective, rather haphazard ‘barrier method’ of immigration control.

When Garda Superintendent M.P. Staunton wrote to Maura Hutchinson from Dundalk in April, he told her: ‘It is now an established fact that the vast majority of foreign nationals who enter / attempt to enter this part of Ireland illegally do so by crossing the Border from Northern Ireland into the South.’ Unless by ‘this part of Ireland’ he was referring to County Louth – and it’s highly unlikely – he was making a claim about the predominant
route of ‘illegal immigration’ into the Republic that is by no means simple to establish as fact.

Attempting to do so, the obvious place to look is the recently published first annual report of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC). This eighty-page glossy could pass as bumf from your bank – except that behind the dreadful bureaucracy-meets-PR prose, the friendly logo and the photos of happy, white-skinned officials among the potted plants of their openplan office, the reader encounters titbits about deportations, fingerprinting, and even X-ray exams on asylum-seekers who claim to be ‘unaccompanied minors’ to see if they are really as young as they say. At the back are the statistics, among them this one: from the time of the establishment of ORAC in November 2000 to the end of 2001, some 75-4 per cent of the 11,357 asylum applications were made at ORAC, rather than at Dublin Airport (18.7 per cent) or ‘Other’ (5.9 per cent).

Asylum applications remain the only reliable way of getting a handle on what we might call ‘informal’ immigration (i.e. not involving Irish or EU nationals or others with work permits). The Minister for Justice acknowledges that a large majority of such immigrants are legally and correctly engaged in the system of application, appeal, etc. At least some of Operation Hyphen’s ‘illegals’ turned out to be people whose status was confused, not-yet-updated or caught between phases, rather than clandestine. However, with the ORAC report showing that the office’s refusals of asylum applications outnumber its grants by about ten to one, it wouldn’t be entirely surprising if many immigrants, especially those without an Irish-born child or the prospect of one, simply tried to evade the system completely. A source close to the application process told me that the official prospects for Nigerians and Romanians (who together made up nearly half of applications to ORAC in its first thirteen months) are especially dismal: the state has deportation arrangements with their home countries, and not only do most of their asylum applications fail, but the
last-gasp post-rejection procedure, application for temporary humanitarian leave to remain, is virtually certain to fail for applicants from these countries.

So are ‘the vast majority’ of informal migrants coming via Northern Ireland? Extrapolating from such numbers as exist isn’t entirely straightforward. In a 2000 ‘Blue Paper’ on the Common Travel Area between the UK and Ireland, published by the Policy Institute in association with the Department of Justice, researcher Elizabeth Meehan interpreted earlier place-of-asylum application statistics as follows: ‘By inference, it would seem . . . that the majority of applicants for asylum must have evaded detection at the first point of clearance in Great Britain, becoming able to enter Ireland from the North – or possibly, landing at Dublin airport without announcing themselves or being noticed. It is, however, not impossible that they may have arrived undetected via the “outer perimeter”, either having been smuggled through Rosslare, or having travelled openly with false documents, and proceeded inland.’

That’s an awful lot of ‘inference’, ‘possibly’, ‘not impossible’ and ‘either/or’, and not a lot of established fact. There is anecdotal evidence that some North-South ‘smuggling’ does take place – most notably among Chinese immigrants – but given the abundance of unsecured roads across the border, this is much more likely to involve hiring a car or taxi than boarding the train. Though it seems an odd use of state resources to place up to five gardai virtually full-time at Dundalk’s train station to prevent perhaps one person a day from entering the Republic, immigration checks along the border are not entirely eccentric. An informed guess, according to one immigrant, is that something less than half but more than a third of asylum-seekers have entered from the North. He says the estimate is complicated by a further twist: some people use Northern Ireland and the Republic as transit points into Britain, by flying from a third country into Belfast – regarded as a relatively ‘easy’ airport for immigrants – and then crossing the border,
finally ferrying or even flying to Britain, where boats and flights originating in Ireland receive little immigration scrutiny.

Prior to 1997, travellers entering the Republic from any part of the UK did not encounter immigration controls, owing to the special arrangement between the two states known as the Common Travel Area. In June of that year, with an election approaching, the Minister for Justice, Nora Owen, secured an amendment to the Aliens Order that gave ‘Immigration Officers’ the power to carry out checks on such travellers and to ‘refuse such persons leave to land on the same grounds as apply to persons arriving from outside the Common Travel Area’, according to a Department of Justice leaflet. This arose, the Department says, ‘from growing evidence that the Common Travel Area was being abused by persons who were not entitled to avail of it’. In relation to the Belfast train, there were initially spot checks at Connolly Station in Dublin; these subsequently gave way, for obvious reasons of geography – and perhaps, less obviously, because checks at a busy Dublin commuter station could become a focus for political opposition – to the activity up the line at Clarke Station.

When the Illegal Immigration (Trafficking) Act (2000) was being framed and debated, there was a proposal that carriers should face ‘strict liability’ – that is, they could be fined or punished for carrying ‘illegals’ whether or not they knew they were doing so. Much of the debate focused on lorry drivers who might unwittingly carry a human cargo, but airlines, shipping companies and, of course, Iarnród Éireann and Northern Ireland Rail might also have been affected. Strict liability was dropped from the legislation, but Michael McDowell has indicated that a new immigration bill will return to the issue and place the onus on carriers: ‘They should not carry [people] into Ireland for profit and for reward unless they have checked that it’s legal for them to come here,’ he told the Sunday Independent.
But wouldn’t this mean that railway officials would face the same dilemma that immigration officers do now: either engage in racial profiling or carry out document checks on every intending passenger? They would probably be on questionable ground under the Equal Status Act (1999) if they did the former, and would certainly incur significant costs in time and effort if they tried the latter.

According to Niall Crowley, chief executive of the Equality Authority, it is not yet clear whether Garda behaviour like that witnessed in Dundalk can be viewed as illegally discriminatory under the Equal Status Act. The state is subject to the provisions of the Act in relation to the provision of ‘services’, but not to the exercise of ‘functions’. On the face of it, immigration control would appear to be a function rather than a service, but ‘we still need to see what contribution the legislation has to offer’, Crowley says. He would like to see the legislation amended to cover ‘functions’ – as happened in England and Wales following the enquiry into the London Metropolitan Police investigation of the racially motivated killing of Steven Lawrence.

5

Back in Dundalk, something has changed. When I visited Clarke Station in late July, I was told by an employee that ‘there haven’t been any checks here in two or three months’. ‘I think they’re doing it on the roads now,’ another man said.

A Garda spokesman was not prepared to comment on the specific reasons for any change – demurring with the standard reference to ‘operational matters’ – but denied that the practice of checking rail passengers had been abandoned. He suggested, instead, that the force was keeping up with the changing transit tactics of potential illegal immigrants: ‘Operationally, the position would be changing all the time, and we have to tailor our
policies to suit.’ What about the apparent coincidence between a small flurry of negative publicity about the Dundalk checks in the late spring of this year and their apparent cessation? ‘Oh yes, we take our policies directly from the letters page of The Irish Times,’ the Garda spokesman said.

The Garda Síochána is not covered by the Freedom of Information Act, so it is difficult to gain further insight into the force’s policies and practices in this area. ‘It says something about the approach to security of the state that the Army is covered but the Garda are not,’ says Seamus Dooley. Iarnród Éireann and the other CIE companies are also not covered.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, largely responsible for immigration policy, is covered by the Freedom of Information Act, but the wholeheartedness of its commitment is less clear. The story is told that when the Act came in five years ago, the then junior minister in the Department of the Taoiseach, Eithne Fitzgerald – responsible, in the main, for the legislation – raised her glass at the celebrations ‘to absent friends in the Department of Justice’.

In early June, I made a request to the Department’s freedom of information officer for access to records relating to the policy, procedures and practice of immigration controls on the Belfast-Dublin rail service and at train stations in the Republic, as well as records of the deliberations leading to Nora Owen’s amendment to the Aliens Order, including but not limited to assessments of the abuse of the Common Travel Area by aliens travelling by rail.

The legislation requires that I receive a response within four weeks. Just over a month had passed when I received a mildly apologetic phone call admitting that the Department had failed to comply and that I was now entitled to seek an internal review into that failure, but really if I hung on a few more days they would have a proper reply for me. I was given to understand, intriguingly, that the delay was due to a ‘third-party
consultation’ with ‘British authorities’. After another week’s wait, I was told that, in fact, the ‘third party’ – they were no longer declaring this to be the British authorities – had until the end of July to reply to the ‘consultation’. Well, surely there were records that didn’t involve the third party? Indeed, it seemed there probably were, and they’d scare those up for me within another few days.

Another few days passed. By this stage I was doing all the phoning, and promised replies never came. On 26 July there was still nothing, and the relevant officer in the immigration division was apparently on leave, so I would have to wait a few more days.

Eight weeks on from the request, on 2 August, I was sent a brown envelope containing twenty-six pages of ‘records’, seven of which were a photocopy of passages from the British Immigration Act (1971) and subsequent statutory instruments relating to travel from the Republic of Ireland to the UK. The paucity of documentation was surprising enough; what was really astonishing, though, was the cover letter. You see, the Freedom of Information Act took effect, for the Department of Justice, on 21 April 1998; I had specifically requested documents reaching back prior to that date, on the grounds, laid out in the Act, that they would be necessary to understand records created later. However, the civil servant’s letter said: ‘As all the records held by this Department in respect of this matter were created prior to the commencement of the Act, the right of access, under the Act, does not exist.’ That’s right: the department responsible for the state’s immigration policy and procedures says it has no records, no letters, no documents, no emails, no notes of telephone calls, relating to immigration controls on the Belfast-Dublin train or at railway stations dating from the past four and a half years.

Suddenly, the yarns one hears about civil servants being warned, since 1998, to ‘write nothing down’ gained a measure of credibility. As a small consolation prize, the Department utilized Section 6(8) of the Act to release information not otherwise covered
by the Act, a series of pre-1998 letters and notes relating to the 1997 amendment to the Aliens Order. None of these make any reference to rail travel or, indeed, any specific reference to movement of migrants from North to South. It’s clear that the emphasis of the Department’s thinking at the time was on passengers arriving from Great Britain. An October 1996 letter from a British immigration official to an Irish counterpart, Noel Waters, spelled out how the UK law worked in relation to passengers from Ireland: the British act enables officers to check ‘any persons who have arrived in the United Kingdom by ship or aircraft’, though ‘it is not normally our practice to examine persons arriving from Ireland’.

Four months later, in a February 1997 submission to colleagues and the Minister, Noel Waters wrote (and I quote verbatim): ‘The UK side of the CTA [Common Travel Area] have long since a legislative provision in place of the type now being contemplated by us . . . Obviously the whole area of illegal immigration and large numbers of asylum seekers which is only coming to the fore here now, has been thorn in the side of the UK for many years . . .’ As evidence of the need for controls, Waters cited a week-long Garda operation at Dún Laoghaire and North Wall ports, in which ‘a total of 29 persons comprising Kenyan, Zairian, Nigerian, Angolan and Romanian nationals were turned back’. Again, there was no mention of overland transport. By 20 June 1997, with a general election fast approaching, a Department official was writing to the Attorney General’s office to request ‘the urgent drafting of a suitable amending order’ to the Aliens Order. And urgent it was, with Nora Owen signing the order on 25 June. From then on, though there were to be no formal immigration controls at places of entry, ‘an immigration officer may examine an alien arriving in the state from Great Britain or Northern Ireland’. A ‘briefing note’ of November 1997 states that ‘since the Order was introduced, over 940 persons have been detected seeking to enter the state illegally from Britain or Northern Ireland’.
And that’s it, a short history of the Aliens (Amendment) (No.3) Order, 1997. We are presumably meant to believe that after this flurry of bureaucratic activity in 1996 and 1997, the operation of the Order was left solely in the hands of the Garda Síochána, with no further thought given to it by the Department. Is that really all the state has to tell us about how, why, and at whose direction black people have been taken off trains at Dundalk?
Chapter 2.7

extracts from The Frontman: Bono (In the Name of Power)


Introduction

Celebrity philanthropy comes in many guises, but perhaps no single figure better encapsulates its delusions, pretensions and misdirections than does the lead singer of rock band U2, Paul Hewson, aka Bono.

That’s because Bono is more than a mere giver of charity – indeed, his fame in this realm has nothing to do with the spending of his own considerable fortune on the needs of the poor. He is, instead, an ‘advocate’, and as such has become a symbol of the essentially benign character of the west’s rich elite, ever ready to help the world’s poor – just waiting for a little encouragement, and a few good ideas, to eliminate hunger and poverty forever. This makes him an ideal frontman for a system of imperial exploitation and war whose depredations and depravity remain as savage as ever.

Bono’s own description of what he does for a living is ‘travelling salesman’, latest in a line: A lot of our family are traveling salesman. And of course that is what I have become! I am very much a traveling salesman. And that, if you really want to know, is how I see myself. I sell songs from door to door, from town to town. I sell melodies and words. And for me, in my political work, I sell ideas. In the commercial world that I’m entering into, I’m also selling ideas. So I see myself in a long line of family sales people.\(^1\) He has certainly been a more-than-competent seller of his musical work, and of himself. In his own version of the metaphor, politically he travels the world selling ideas about how to help the world’s poor – selling them mainly to the powerful people and institutions that can turn those ideas into reality. This is at best a partial account, however: in reality the
idea that he is most seriously engaged in selling is the one about how those powerful people and institutions are genuinely committed to making the world a more just and equitable place. And he's selling that to us.

Bono is nothing if not cosmopolitan. As an Americanised Irishman who has conspicuously joined forces with the British government in the past and is linked in the public eye with the fate of Africa, Bono is among the most thoroughly transatlantic of elite figures. (Former Irish attorney-general Peter Sutherland, chairman of Goldman Sachs International, ex-chairman of BP, and before that the first head of the World Trade Organisation, is perhaps his nearest globe-besriding equivalent – an advisor to banks and governments who has been called ‘the father of globalisation’— and we shall see that Bono’s similarities to such a thoroughly establishment character go beyond their moneyed Dublin accents.) In the United States, the belief that Bono brings some vaguely understood ‘European’ value-set to the global discussion may be part of the reason that he is viewed widely there as a largely benign and politically left-liberal figure. At one of George W. Bush’s warmest public appearances with the singer (‘Bono, I appreciate your heart’), the then-president couldn’t resist an anecdote that relied for its humour on the perception that Bono was his political opposite: ‘Dick Cheney walked in the Oval Office, he said: “Jesse Helms wants us to listen to Bono’s ideas.”’ This brought the house down, with Bono himself smiling and clapping. This political perception, however, is based upon a misunderstanding of both his own ‘values’ and those of institutional Europe: neither Bono nor the EU is nearly as committed to social justice and collectivist values as US pundits are wont to insist. Meanwhile, his tendency to verbal and emotional Americanisms is part of the reason he is viewed with greater suspicion in Europe – or at least, strikingly, in Britain and Ireland, where Bono is largely a figure of ridicule and the object of often nasty abuse. The British comic magazine Viz called him ‘the little twat with the big heart’, while writer Jann Bussman suggested in the Guardian that Bono purveys ‘self-serving
bollocks’, with Africa serving a ‘masturbatory function’ for him. Then there is the oft-heard, surely apocryphal story of a Glasgow U2 gig when Bono silenced the audience and began a slow handclap, then whispered weightily: ‘Every time I clap my hands, a child in Africa dies.’ A voice cried out from the audience: ‘Well, fucking stop doin’ it then.’

Ridicule of this sort is widespread in Ireland but rare in the Irish media, where U2’s friends are many and their influence and patronage large. Indeed, consideration of Bono in his home country is complicated by the peculiarly Irish concept of ‘begrudery’, an alleged national tendency to tear down those who are successful. This tendency, insofar as it exists, is born of a healthy, possibly postcolonial suspicion that the world is less meritocratic than it makes out, or that success has often come at a moral cost. Sadly, begrudery is more often bemoaned than typified: ‘fuck the begrudgers’ is Ireland’s ancient and venerable and ubiquitous version of ‘haters gonna hate’.

Petty begrudery certainly exists; most Dubliners have probably either said or heard the following: ‘I saw Bono in town today, but I pretended not to recognise him – I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction.’ In reality, however, Ireland was all too short of begrudgers during the 1990s and 2000s boom years known as the Celtic Tiger, when financiers, bond-holders, politicians, journalists, property developers and even rock stars were inflating a mad bubble that, when it burst, decimated economic life in the country. This book, in any case, has nothing to do with envy and doesn’t question the basis for Bono’s success – the music industry is probably slightly more meritocratic than most – but rather how he has chosen to use it politically.

The widely varying views of Bono across and within countries pose a dilemma for the writer, especially one writing for an international audience. How seriously can you treat a figure who is so often ridiculed, in such a range of venues, for so many reasons? There’s also the fact that Bono, as a public figure, can be hard to pin down because he works in
so many registers even by the standards of our frictionless, boundaryless celebrity culture: one day, it seems, you read that he is meeting the leaders of the G8, the next that he is pursuing his ex-stylist through the courts to recover a hat; this morning he’s selling you an iPod, this evening it’s his version of the Irish peace process. Ultimately, I have endeavoured to take him as seriously as he appears to take himself, which is to say ‘very’ but with regular efforts at deprecation and light relief. The reason I take seriousness as a starting point has a only a little to do with the respect that any person is due – too much of the ridicule of Bono is dumb and misguided anyway – but more to do with the fact that he appears to be taken seriously (his organisations funded, him personally invited on to prestigious platforms) by the world’s most powerful people. To understand why they do that means rising above mere terms of abuse, most of the time anyway.

I adopt this relatively high tone with some regret – as you move down the social scale the dislike of Bono gets stronger: if Tony Blair is at one, loving extreme, then the graffitiscrawlers of inner-city Dublin are at the other, and I would hate to think of the latter feeling entirely neglected. But in a world where the New York Times mostly treats Bono like a guru, whereas many Guardian writers treat him like a fool; where many continental Europeans regard him as a great artist, while America’s South Park satirists depict him as literally a piece of shit; where the BBC does a slightly probing TV documentary called Bono’s Millions in 2003, then devotes a whole day of promotional radio programming to the release of U2’s new album in 2009; where a friend I meet in the pub wonders why I would want to criticise Bono, then one I meet on the street reckons my task is too easy to be a proper challenge – in such a world there is no perfect way to approach this book. I hope the way I’ve chosen makes it more likely that some of Bono’s many fans and admirers will be prepared to engage with my arguments.

I am myself neither a big fan nor a dedicated detractor of U2’s music. The Frontman considers Bono largely as a political operator, rather than as a cultural producer. Bono
himself many years ago said he saw the roles as separate, and music as a largely useless vehicle for political change. So this will not be the book that decides if *Achtung Baby* is really better than *War*. But, even within those limits, it would be remiss for this book not to consider, for example, what ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday’ tells us about Bono’s posturing on Irish politics, or whether U2’s turn from an American toward a European visual and musical aesthetic in the early 1990s had any political analogue. Insofar as the business, the politics and the music are intertwined, it is important to reflect that, as well as to try to unravel them.

This is, obviously, not conventional biography; nor is it an effort at psychological profiling of its subject. Although I indulge in occasional speculation about his thoughts and motives, it will not, sadly, be possible to get right behind the wrap-around shades and discern what interplay of idealism and cynicism gives rise to a figure like Bono. I am loath to judge another man’s motivation, but nor would it be appropriate simply to assume, despite what many of his acquaintances have told me, that in his political and humanitarian roles ‘he means well’. The point of *The Frontman* is to focus not on what motivates Bono but on his rhetoric, his actions, and their consequences. For nearly three decades as a public figure, and especially in this century, Bono has been, more often than not, amplifying elite discourses, advocating ineffective solutions, patronising the poor, and kissing the arses of the rich and powerful. He has been generating and reproducing ways of seeing the developing world, especially Africa, that are no more than a slick mix of traditional missionary and commercial colonialism, in which the poor world exists as a task for the rich world to complete. In big and small ways, he has turned his attention to a planet of savage injustice, inequality and exploitation, and it is not unreasonable to argue that he has, in some ways, helped make it worse.

Has he also helped make it better? There is no doubt that some of his campaigning and the work of the organisations he supports have improved the lives, health and well-being
of many people in Africa. It would be silly to insist otherwise. And it would be presumptuous in the extreme to suggest that this or any other book can omnisciently weigh up the faults and accomplishments and deliver a definitive, objective verdict. I have endeavoured to give credit to Bono where I believe it’s due, but I don’t pretend to be a neutral arbiter. I could build and wallpaper an outhouse with the literally hundreds of books and articles that explicate How Bono Makes It Better: they are readily available online and in your local library. This one sets out to make the opposite case.

Bono himself is not shy about taking a lot of credit. He recently called his campaigning ‘a movement that changed the world’.6 In the midst of the George W. Bush years, he said: ‘People openly laughed in my face when I suggested that this administration would distribute antiretroviral drugs to Africa. They said, “You are out of your tiny mind.” There’s 200,000 Africans now who owe their lives to America.’7 The construction of those sentences makes it impossible to resist the invitation to substitute the word ‘America’ with the word ‘me’.

The idea that Bono makes it worse is, one might reasonably object, simply a political opinion – one based on what I think is clear-sighted, well informed analysis, but an opinion nonetheless. Other writers have looked at the same career, the same facts, and drawn opposite conclusions. Readers are invited to judge for themselves. However, the depoliticising language of humanitarianism, the image of Bono as outside, above and beyond politics, has often rendered the expression of mere political difference about him difficult to express. So whether or not you ultimately agree that Bono ‘makes it worse’, the point of this book is to place him and, by extension, celebrity humanitarianism firmly in the realm of politics, and therefore of political difference. To do that means to underline a few indisputable facts: that he stands for a particular set of discourses, values and material forces within a wider debate about global poverty, development and justice;
that though these discourses, values and forces are often vaguely and misleadingly expressed, these can broadly be characterised as conservative, western-centric and pro-capitalist; that they are seen as fundamentally non-threatening by the elites that have wreaked havoc on the world; and that they are capable of being vigorously contested and criticised both in principle and in terms of their effectiveness. In other words, after reading this book, you might well still believe that Bono is right, but perhaps no longer believe that his rightness is self-evident, beyond argument.

Whether or not Bono is right, I hope it will be difficult for anyone who has read this book to maintain that he is ‘left’. Indeed, since 2005 he and his organisations have been frequently derisive of approaches that they see as leftish. ‘It … would be really wrong beating a sort of left-wing drum, taking the usual bleeding-heart-liberal line’ is a typical Bono statement about where he locates his campaigning politics.⁸ Of course he would also say, in the unlikely event that he were asked, that he is not right-wing either. It is precisely the notion that the technocratic ‘problem-solving’ approaches that he advocates are somehow apolitical that needs to be contested.

The rise of Bono as a political operator since the late 1990s is tied to larger and disquieting developments in transnational governance, by which the biggest states, corporations, foundations and multilateral institutions have undermined democratic accountability and sovereignty throughout the world, often in the name of humanitarianism. Bono is a relatively small (though nonetheless significant) player in this project, and to consider it fully is beyond the bounds of this volume. By the end of the book, as Bono’s close ties to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and its agenda for African development are considered, readers may be encouraged to learn more.
[Chapter 3 The World]
Wealth: Defending property

Wherever two or three of the world’s rich and powerful are gathered, there too shall you find Bono, telling them how good they are. But Bono does more than schmooze at places like Davos: he launches projects, he presents plans, he promotes causes – it’s a lot of work being the world’s leading humanitarian, but he makes sure he’s there on merit.

Sometimes he does have to give way a little to the upstarts of the good-doing realm. Thus in the summer of 2006, when Rupert Murdoch held his annual three-day get-together for top News Corporation executives, in Pebble Beach, California, Tony Blair spoke on the first night, effectively presenting his credentials for the post–prime-ministerial career that he would officially kick off the following year; Bill Clinton gave the closing speech; and Bono had to squeeze his ‘keynote’ on ‘The Power of One’ somewhere in between. But he knew how to upstage the politicians: instead of speaking at the usual glass-and-steel venue, like the unimaginative Blair and Clinton, Bono dragged his Murdochian congregation to the old Mission church in nearby Carmel. 9

Such is Bono’s special status among the elite globalist sets of Bilderbergers and Trilateralists that he has, inevitably, come to the attention of American conspiracy theorists, who incoherently (even by their standards) paint him as a knowing ‘frontman for genocide’ through his connection to an obscure but deadly eugenics agenda that appears to be run by Bill Gates. 10

As usual, such ravings distract from serious consideration of Bono’s place in the world and the service he provides to the powerful by dressing their work, individually and collectively, in humanitarian garb – a relationship that is right out in the open and can be viewed clearly without resort to conspiracy.
It is not just in Davos and Pebble Beach that Bono is a big draw, obviously. The exalted place of Bono and U2 in the rock ‘n’ roll pantheon has not been in doubt, at least in the United States, for at least a quarter-century. But it was interesting that, on the night that status was officially underlined at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, a leading American musician, making the induction speech, casually mocked Bono’s famous role in the wider world and presented him, albeit that he was ostensibly joking, as a ‘shyster’. Bruce Springsteen was supposed to be returning the favour that Bono had done for him six years earlier, when ‘the Boss’ was inducted – Bono made a very good if unexceptional speech in 1999 – and Springsteen in 2005 produced a veritable tour de force of backhanded compliments and faint praise, slyly capturing something of the special qualities of the U2 singer.11

The Springsteen speech was not at all overtly hostile, and pays plenty of blush-inducing compliments, especially to U2’s ‘sonic architecture’ and spirituality: Springsteen and Bono, indeed, are known to be friendly.12

But whereas, for example, Edge was ‘a rare and true guitar original and one of the subtlest guitar heroes of all time’, Bono was merely ‘one of the great frontmen of the past twenty years’13 – not a time-frame that presents the very toughest competition. And while he didn’t stint when describing some of Bono’s performing qualities, Springsteen disposed of all the Irishman’s humanitarian work in one vague, overcooked sentence about ‘ideals’ and ‘connection’, and instead concentrated on Bono as huckster:

Bono ... where do I begin? Jeans designer, soon-to-be World Bank operator [there were rumours at the time that President Bush might appoint Bono to the World Bank], just plain operator, seller of the Brooklyn Bridge – oh hold up, he played under the Brooklyn Bridge, that’s right. Soon-to-be mastermind operator of the Bono burger franchise, where more than one million stories will be told by a crazy Irishman. Now I realize that it’s a dirty job and somebody has to do it, but don’t quit your day job yet, my friend.14
Springsteen went on: ‘Shaman, shyster, one of the greatest and most endearingly naked messianic complexes in rock and roll.’ (Then he had the decency to add: ‘It takes one to know one, of course.’) Springsteen, well known for eschewing commercial endorsements, moved to the climax of his speech with a devastating and funny story about how he had discovered, the previous year, that U2 had teamed up with Apple to make an iPod advertisement:

Well … there I was sitting down on the couch in my pyjamas with my eldest son. He was watching TV. I was doing one of my favorite things – I was tallying up all the money I passed up in endorsements over the years and thinking of all the fun I could have had with it. Suddenly I hear ‘Uno, dos, tres, catorce!’ [the opening of ‘Vertigo’] I look up. But instead of the silhouettes of the hippie wannabes bouncing around in the iPod commercial, I see my boys! Oh, my God! They sold out!15

Springsteen then joked about his own ‘insanely expensive lifestyle … I burn money, and that calls for huge amounts of cash flow. But I also have a ludicrous image of myself that keeps me from truly cashing in.’ He recounted how he phoned his manager Jon Landau the next morning to find out how U2, also previously supposed to be above all that, had pulled off this stroke.

‘They didn’t take any money?! … Smart, wily Irish guys.’ Anybody … anybody … can do an ad and take the money. But to do the ad and not take the money … that’s smart. That’s wily. I say, ‘Jon, I want you to call up Bill Gates or whoever is behind this thing and float this: a red, white, and blue iPod signed by Bruce “the Boss” Springsteen. Now remember, no matter how much money he offers, don’t take it!’16

The Boss iPod has yet to appear, of course. Springsteen’s portrait of himself as a naif who didn’t know his Gates from his Jobs was clearly a joke, but his decision to wind up his speech with a story that portrayed U2 as smart and wily corporate operators who had gone where he himself refused to go was a pointed one. Springsteen didn’t need to spell it out: we were invited to consider the wiles of men who publicly proclaimed that no cash had changed hands for this ad, while at the same time getting their new record featured in a global advertising campaign that someone else was paying for. Then there was the
special U2-branded iPod itself: it turns out that the band and Apple were sharing profits from that product.\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, any arrangement whereby U2 weren’t profiting from this arrangement would have been absurd and exploitative; but they managed to hide the simple business facts of how they were ‘cashing in’ behind their aura of cool integrity.

Reports of their prior purity were also somewhat exaggerated. While U2 music hadn’t been used previously in product advertising, there were a number of commercial and charitable bodies that got licences: ‘Beautiful Day’, for example, was used as an opening theme for soccer-highlights shows in Britain and Denmark – it was quite an effective adrenalin hit when played over fast-moving clips of goals, saves and tackles – and the same song was used by the US TV network CBS to plug its autumn 2002 season, part of an arrangement by which CBS also screened a U2 concert film; the American ABC network had done something similar to the 2002 CBS arrangement, with varying music, back in 1997; U2’s Super Bowl appearance in 2002 meant Rupert Murdoch’s Fox TV and the National Football League could use the band’s songs to promote the game; ‘Electrical Storm’ introduced the America’s Cup yacht-racing on New Zealand television; and Bono’s old child-sponsoring friends in World Vision used ‘I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For’ in Australian TV advertising.\textsuperscript{18}

The October 2004 Apple arrangement, with the U2 iPod as its centrepiece and a couple of nice sweeteners – the release of Vertigo, and an unprecedented ‘Complete U2 digital box-set’ at a mere $149 exclusively on the iTunes store – was a key moment for both U2 and the tech company. The iPod was just three years old, the iTunes store barely eighteen months, and U2 were helping Apple ease an older demographic of potential customers into its vice-like grip: it was and is notoriously difficult for people who begin to use the Apple hardware and software to purchase, manage and listen to their music ever to escape to other companies’ products. But both brands, U2 and Apple, had also managed
to imbue themselves with aesthetic and moral properties that seemed to place them above such grubby market considerations.

Steve Jobs – who the previous year had sold a duplex apartment on Central Park West to Bono – made the iPod deal sound like an extension of fandom: ‘U2 is one of the greatest bands in the world and we are floored to be working with them.’ Bono, as is his wont, found the emotional connection, the feeling, in this moment: ‘We want our audience to have a more intimate online relationship with the band, and Apple can help us do that. With iPod and iTunes, Apple has created a crossroads of art, commerce and technology which feels good for both musicians and fans.’ The Edge chimed in with music to corporate ears: ‘iPod and iTunes look like the future to me and it’s good for everybody involved in music.’

The iPod and iTunes were indeed ‘the future’, and surely that would have been the case with or without U2. But at a time when artists and consumers were beginning to question all sorts of things about iTunes in particular – its pricing structure, the digital-rights management it used to lock up the songs people purchased, the way it sustained and reproduced the old record-company relationships that painfully squeezed artists, the massive cut Apple took from every 99-cent song, the roughly 11 cents left for acts if they were lucky – here was the most ethical band in the business arriving on the scene to tell us very loudly that it ‘feels good’, it is good, for musicians, fans, everyone.

The reference to the way it ‘feels’ was presumably at least partly an indirect way of alluding to how bummed-out consumers were supposed to be feeling about illegally downloading music. As the anti-industry activist group Downhill Battle put it in a parody ad: ‘With iTunes I don’t feel guilty when I download music – Apple and the record labels handle the screw job for me.’

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Bono, in fact, had endorsed iTunes on its fanfare-filled launch on Windows operating systems in 2003. He appeared behind Steve Jobs live on the big screen and declared, ‘I’d like to teach the world to iTunes.’ Calling Jobs ‘the Dalai Lama of integration’, Bono said: That’s why I’m here, to kiss the corporate ass, and I don’t kiss every corporate ass.’21 (Even as of 2012, the number of corporate asses Bono has publicly kissed remains in the low double-digits, so he is indeed not especially promiscuous.)

Bono and U2 had a choice, and they made it. While other artists were fighting the labels and building alternative ways of reaching their audiences, one of the biggest acts in the business, with one of the most loyal followings, almost unparalleled resources and a reputation for idealistic innovation, chose to lend its support to a highly centralised, closed-source corporate system of delivering music that was using new technology to recapitulate the sins of the old. And they were well rewarded for kissing the corporate ass, both by Apple and by a largely compliant media that viewed the move as placing the band somewhere in the vicinity of the cutting edge – technologically and culturally, at least, if not musically. The decades-deep integration of the traditional mainstream media with the record companies’ way of doing business, and rewarding journalists, shouldn’t be underestimated in evaluating the media’s love-affair with the industry and its apparent saviour, Apple, with U2 by its side.

It was no surprise when, two years later, Bono’s (RED) featured an Apple iPod as one of the early products carrying the conscientious new brand.

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**Grassroots: An agricultural agenda**

Bono’s ONE [campaign] has got a tremendous amount of funding from the Gates Foundation: a total of $83 million between 2006 and 2009 to last until the end of 2012, with a little $1 million top-up in March 2012, according to the Gates Foundation’s own online records. (The campaign’s annual report is not required to be fully and transparently
detailed about its sources of money.) Given that fact, and given that the first CEO of the united ONE organisation came in directly from that foundation, ONE can legitimately be seen not only as Bono’s main humanitarian vehicle of recent years, but also as part of the information and campaigning operation of the vast $30plus billion Gates charitable fortune.

....

The Gates Foundation’s agenda, its vision, on agriculture has emerged clearly enough for those who choose to look for it. In 2006 it joined forces with the Rockefeller Foundation to establish the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), promoting scientific and technological solutions to increasing agricultural production, very much in partnership with companies such as Monsanto. Gates has also funded GM and other agri-science research in Western universities and institutions.²² So-called ‘green revolutions’ have been hotly debated in terms of their impact in countries such as Mexico and India, where they may have boosted production but also driven poor farmers into debt and off the land – in India, notoriously, into suicide by their thousands – because of the expense of repeatedly having to purchase the new high-tech inputs to seed and nourish increasingly exhausted soil. The respected Indian journalist P. Sainath has documented an incredible 270,940 farm suicides between 1995 and 2011, even while India’s farm population has been falling, and ‘despite an orchestrated (and expensive) campaign in the media and other forums by governments and major seed corporations to show that their efforts had made things a lot better’.²³ A 2005 American PBS documentary looked at the incredible spate of ‘suicides by pesticide’, and linked the phenomenon to GM promotion by, yes, Cargill and Monsanto.²⁴ This has not deterred the foundations from pursuing more of the same in Africa, encouraging farmers to invest to produce higher yields of cash-crops that will integrate them into local and global markets. Even the idea, and reality, of Western companies buying African agricultural land meets with the approval
of Bill Gates himself: ‘Many of these land deals are beneficial, and it would be too bad if some were held back because of Western groups’ ways of looking at things.’ (It is a familiar and clever rhetorical strategy to attribute resistance to western corporate interference to ‘Western groups’, suggesting that Africans themselves have no problem with such ‘progress’ – though this is untrue, as we shall see.) Gates continued: ‘When capital is put into Africa, that’s a good sign.’

Even, that is, when the capital is ‘put in’ to take land out of African hands, forcing local farmers into dependence on Western owners and Western-supplied technology.

Make no mistake, this development has not escaped Bono’s attention. On the contrary, he and ONE have embraced the AGRA ‘sustainable agriculture’ agenda, and Bono himself was one of the initiative’s frontmen at the G8’s latest re-branding exercise, a ‘Global Food Summit’ hosted by the US at Camp David in May 2012. Employing the techno-positivism beloved of Gates and their like, Bono told an interviewer: ‘You know, no one wants to see those extended [sic] bellies ... Hunger is a ridiculous thing. And we know what to do in order to fix it. There’s, you know, these whole new approaches to agriculture to increase productivity.’ Bono was not called upon to specify what ‘these whole new approaches’ might be; his task, in any case, is not to make the technical case for GM and chemical-laden farming, but to mutter the emollient words that will assure audiences that such developments must surely be for the good of Africa’s poor. And what’s good for Africans, Bono added in the same interview, is good for America. Africans ‘are future consumers for the United States. The president [Obama] is talking business. This is good.’

The idea of ‘trade not aid’ to help the ‘entrepreneurial poor’ is of course attractive on the face of it. As Bono said, echoing almost word for word his earlier recollection of Obama’s rhetorical priorities: ‘It’s partnership, it’s not the old paternalism. These are sort of horizontal relationships, not vertical ones.’
Unsurprisingly, given the resources available, there are a great many Africans willing to be horizontal partners in this new ‘revolution’ with Gates, Bono and Western states and companies. But what is more surprising, and inspiring, is that so many people are willing to stand against it. When that same G8 meeting announced a ‘New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition’ – an alliance that included the G8, African governments, and forty-five companies ranging from Unilever to the alcoholic drinks giant Diageo to Monsanto – a number of campaigners were quick to spot what was going on. Oxfam, which had been such a reliable ally of Bono in 2005, was no longer on board: its press release was headlined, sarcastically, ‘G8 food security alliance answers question hungry people have not asked’ – the new ‘answer’ being heightened involvement by multinational companies. Oxfam saw the ‘new alliance’ not only as a way of getting corporations in on the act, but as a diversion, as the G8 continued to ignore old promises it had made of providing aid: the 2009 G8 meeting at L’Aquila, Italy, had promised $22 billion in increased aid, much of which still hadn’t appeared. Now, in a crisis-ridden global economy, aid pledges were being sidelined in favour of this new ‘partnership’.

Oxfam’s Lamine Ndiaye was critical of the corporate agenda: ‘Smallholder farmers need the freedom to pursue their own growing strategies, not take overly-prescriptive tips on farming from G8 leaders, or one size fits all technologies from far away CEOs.’

Other groups and alliances from African civil society had already joined in the condemnation, with an ‘open letter’ statement in advance of the summit:

If the private sector is to play a productive role, there needs to be strong evidence that these kinds of partnerships can actually deliver for small-scale producers. For the initiative to truly be an alliance, women small-scale producers, youth, and pastoralists should have been consulted in the drafting of the plan. Instead, G8 leaders are merely asking African governments for a rubber stamp. Donors increasingly claim to target the small-scale producers who make up the majority of the world’s poor, but they are rarely consulted, and these resources seldom actually reach them.
As with other issues, there is room for legitimate disagreement about the role of GM and increased market integration in the development of African agriculture and the relief of hunger. It is striking, however, that yet again Bono finds himself on the side representing Western ‘philanthro-capitalism’ and the interests of multinational companies seeking to expand their businesses, and their profits, in the fertile soil of the global poor. Even some of those who give Gates and Bono the benefit of the doubt believe they are getting it wrong when pursuing a new Green Revolution in the wake of the failure of previous ones.

Kavita N. Ramdas is an Indian-born researcher in ‘social entrepreneurship’ at Stanford University who has worked with the Gates Foundation – her CV, indeed, is a resumé of good causes that even Bono would envy. Ramdas has said that the foundation’s ‘good intentions’ are turned into bad policy in this area because of the obsession with ‘measurable impacts’, and certain ideological blinkers:

At the root of the difference in approach is what we believe causes hunger or poverty. If you think that people are poor because there is not enough food, then you will concentrate on making measurable gains, in growing more food, and more nutritious food, more efficiently. But if you think that people are poor because of problems with equality, with access, with education, then developing a concrete strategy is far more difficult; these things are not readily measurable.31

The emphasis on production, efficiency, things you can measure, is in some ways understandable. How else can you know what you are achieving? When Bono spoke at the World Bank in November 2012, he was asked what was the most important thing ‘we’ could do to end extreme poverty; he replied, ‘We need open data ... We need better data.’31 But the problem with ‘measurable impacts’ is the things that are left out – not only the factors Ramdas mentions, but also all the alternative approaches that are ignored.33 As researchers such as those at the Institute of Food and Development Policy have long argued, the problem in Africa is not a shortage of food, but food systems that have been distorted by the push to export crops, by the needs of local and foreign elites, and by promotion of technological solutions that push farmers and their knowledge out of
decision-making. Why, in this context, and keeping Ramdas’s words in mind, do Gates and Bono ‘believe’ that the problem is too little food, and ‘think’ that agriculture-on-steroids is the answer? To which one might answer, people mostly ‘believe’ what they want to believe, and ‘think’ what it suits them to think. For Bono to continue to ally himself with the sorts of government and company with which he had stood side-by-side since the late 1990s, and for him to continue to be a useful front to their interests, he had to speak the language of equality, access and education, but also to ‘think’ that the interests and desires of the rich and powerful happily coincide with the making of a better world that would finally deliver upon those values.

**With or without you: Bono today**

In truth, in recent years Bono may have begun to outlive his usefulness as a fashionable accessory to power. If anything, he has probably been too loyal to the forces and figures that were so widely discredited in the post-2007 global crisis – to the Rubins, Clintons and Browns who opened the door to the financial catastrophe, to the Bushes and Blairs who unleashed hell on Third World countries. A little more distance, even in retrospect, might have preserved some of his credibility. But then he wouldn’t be Bono. A decade ago, one might arguably have suggested that he stood outside the system, bringing some moral authority to bear on questions of global poverty and disease and what to do about them. Today, as a high-profile multimillionaire investor, as part of a band of notorious tax-avoiders who assured us that financial innovation was the route to success, as the man who dressed a bunch of multinational corporations in his favoured shade of (RED), as the Blairite who applauded when the world’s war-mongers pretended to lavish some relief on a few poor countries while saddling them with more neoliberal conditions – today, he is hard to see as anything other than one of Them, the elite 1 per cent of 1 per cent.
This perception of him is increasingly widespread, which means that, from the point of view of those who would use him, Bono has perhaps become a too-easy target, the villain of a thousand online comment threads. For every Mike Huckabee – who cited Bono’s great work, and his great love for the USA, from the platform at the 2012 Republican National Convention – there’s a Sinead O’Connor mocking his tax status and calling him “Bozo”…

A renewal of his artistic standing might… improve his political profile. But it’s not like he hasn’t been working on the latter: he remains, despite his setbacks, a favoured symbol of soft power for the global elite when it gathers. His campaign, ONE, is nothing like the mass movement that it pretends to be, but it is present and visible, getting signatures on petitions and lobbying not only in Washington or at the G8, but in various lower-level parliaments and councils in Europe and Africa, where it now boasts offices in Nigeria and South Africa. Politically, Bono is not a ‘fraud’, not in the sense that word is usually understood. The oft-heard assertion that his humanitarian work is a means of garnering free publicity for his profitable music is a half-truth, at best, that significantly underestimates the scale and below-the-radar detail of his advocacy. He is not lacking in genuine commitment, even if the demands of his half-billion-dollar rock band and two-billion-dollar private-equity fund may intrude on his campaigning. (His physical frailty, in the form of back problems, has also intruded on all these activities.) He has given a lot of his time and built up political and organisational nous: his work and his campaigns are linked to real achievements, from marginal debt relief to AIDS drugs to the high visibility of African poverty in western celebrity circles. It is not the existence of those achievements that is questioned in these pages: it is their meaning, and the interests they represent.

Bono and his supporters have, for example, pointed proudly to the rather dramatic rates of economic growth taking place over the last decade in several poor African countries
where his agenda has been active.35 (You might imagine the fate of the Celtic Tiger would make them wary of very rapid growth rates, but apparently not.) However, the vision of Afrooptimism is punctured once you look closely at those numbers, as even the UN acknowledges: a 2012 report shows that “the current pattern of growth is neither inclusive nor sustainable” – that it is growth that is unequally shared and largely fuelled by the extraction of quickly depleting natural resources.36 That sort of ‘development’ is good news for someone, but that someone is not the vast majority of Africa’s poor.

The phenomenon of Bono is profoundly linked to efforts over recent decades by western leaders, both in and out of political office, to project themselves as humanitarian visionaries. (Two of Bono’s best political pals, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, both have global charitable foundations in their names; both have got money from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.) Various endeavours, from violent interventions in Iraq and the former Yugoslavia to the neoliberal restructuring of whole economies in the developing world, have been portrayed as arising from a desire to better the lives of various poor and oppressed peoples, while in fact serving the strategic and economic goals of the west. This is not to be conspiratorial, nor to fail to recognise that there are internal divisions among western elites, so that they don’t always speak with one voice on such matters.

Nonetheless, it has become an important part of the legitimisation of the neoliberal project, often as destructive to the lives, circumstances and democratic voices of people in ‘rich’ developed countries as in the global South, to portray it as a drive for a more just globalised system that will value, include and reward the very people who were beggared by previous versions of imperialism. That’s where Bono comes in.

A transnational class of elites, experts and technocrats in largely unaccountable state institutions and completely unaccountable corporations and foundations continues to lead
the way in this project. Celebrity humanitarians have become instrumental to their work. Bono may not have realised it when he climbed aboard a largely admirable campaign against developing-world debt in the late 1990s, but his reputation for integrity and the love for his music felt by millions of people would become important weapons in the arsenal of those seeking to maintain and extend their influence, power and profit in a changing world. He fronted for the G8; he fronted for Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and George Bush; he fronted for Nike and Apple and Motorola; he fronted for Bill Clinton and Bill Gates and the Irish Financial Services Centre to boot.

Whether he believed in his heart that it was worthwhile to advance the plans and interests of such people and organisations in order to achieve larger benign goals is a moot question. He should be judged not on his motivations or intentions, which are invisible, but on the plain reality of his actions.

Bono cannot be expected to support every righteous cause, but it is striking to note some he has not. For example, right on his doorstep in Ireland, there are the campaigners in County Mayo in the west of the country who are fighting to keep a dangerous Shell gas pipeline and refinery out of their community, and making powerful links with Ogoni people in Nigeria who have waged similar struggles against the petroleum giant. The Irish locals in this boggy, remote landscape sometimes call themselves ‘the Bog-oni’, and they have invited Nigerians and others from around the world to come share their experiences; they have fought in the courts and lain down in front of trucks; they have sailed their fishing boats in front of giant pipe-laying vessels; they have been beaten off the roads by police and security men and been locked up in jail for months at a time; they have drawn attention to the political cowardice and corruption that saw Ireland sell off the rights to its offshore gas and oil to foreign companies at a rate so low it would make a Third World dictator laugh all the way to his Swiss bank. And they have done all this fighting without
an ounce of support from the Irishman who claims to be a campaigner for justice and
global solidarity.

Then there are those Africans who have been fortunate or unfortunate enough to have
actually left Africa, and thus lost Bono’s support. Tens of thousands of African migrants
live in Ireland, many thousands as asylum-seekers forced into an inhumane system called
‘direct provision’. Under this system, some 2,000 asylum-seeker children and 4,000 adults
live packed into hostels, denied the right to work and given a pittance of €19 per week
each (less for the kids) as an allowance.38 For many years one such hostel, Kilmarnock
House, housing 100 or more residents and owned by a controversial Protestant pastor, was
located in Bono’s home village of Killiney – perhaps he could even see it, a mile or so
away, from his hillside mansion. It wasn’t one of the better hostels: residents said
conditions there were ‘prison-like’, and indeed at one point it was closed temporarily on
health-and-safety grounds.39 A grim 2004 ‘needs assessment’ of its residents said that
‘due to the extremely limited availability of funding, most of the recommendations are
constrained to activities that could be implemented by the community and voluntary
sectors’.40 A number of people and organisations in Ireland campaign visibly for migrant
rights, but Bono is not one of them. Chinedu Onyejelem, a Nigerian-born community
activist who edits a ‘multicultural’ newspaper in Ireland and is usually adept at securing
support from the great and good, was emphatic when asked if Bono had been of help to
Ireland’s Africans: ‘The answer is NO. I tried several times to contact him and to get him
to do something with us, but never got beyond his agent.’41

Perhaps contact with real grassroots activism of this sort would interfere with Bono’s
rhetorically crucial claims to ‘represent’ the world’s poor. He periodically laughs at the
cheekiness of his unelected representation, and recently even wished for the day when it
would no longer be necessary, and he could ‘fuck off’.42 However, Bono has nonetheless
not been shy of making the claim: ‘I’m representing the poorest and most vulnerable people. On a spiritual level, I have that with me. I’m throwing a punch, and the fist belongs to people who can’t be in the room, whose rage, whose anger, whose hurt I represent.\(^\text{43}\)

Richard Dienst has dismantled this claim with brilliant and bitter precision:

He does not claim to represent their interests, their perspectives, or even their hopes, but rather their ‘rage, anger, and hurt’: That is to say, he does not represent human beings, he represents affects, detached from real lives and filtered through his celebrity image … It is not as if ‘the poorest and most vulnerable people’ do not express themselves, in countless ways, all the time. They are articulate, deliberate, and far too various to be summed up just by their pain or their poverty. They have many representatives, too, in and out of governments. All of them are aching to be heard. None of that seems to matter when Bono goes to the White House. Indeed, we should make no mistake about it: he can stand there precisely because those people are so absent; he can speak for them exactly insofar as they are silenced; he can ‘throw a punch’ at Bush, Blair, Obama, or any of the others only because he disguises the immense material force of their lives with the soft ‘moral force’ of his rhetoric…. What is missing, invisible, off the agenda, is any belief that economic development can be a mode of collective self-determination, opening up a realm of freedom for the poor beyond that envisioned for them by billionaires.\(^\text{44}\)

There can scarcely have been a more perfect expression of the way anything that might ever have been good or real about Bono has become corrupted, and of the relationship between the west and the global south he has come to ‘represent’, than what happened in the summer of 2012 on a popular African television programme. This was \textit{Big Brother Africa: Stargame}, the seventh season of a pan-African version of the vicious and voyeuristic ‘reality’ show that puts a group of strangers into a fully televised house and pits them against each other around the clock, with a cash prize at stake; they must often appear to cooperate with each other in tasks in order for each to advance his or her strategy for success, achieved partly through public voting. The show is, as its title suggests, a depiction of a microcosm of the surveillance state portrayed in George Orwell’s famous novel \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four}; but it is also, intentionally or not, a metaphor for, and embodiment of, the savage world of deceit, betrayal, false appearances, ruthless competition and commercial exploitation of even the most humane relationships that characterise neoliberal capitalism; the African version adds implied competition
between nations to this happy script. Needless to say, it was popular over its three full
months in the forty-seven African countries that screened it, sixteen of which were
represented among the ‘housemates’. Bono’s ONE Campaign had got itself involved with
a gardening task on the show, as part of its ‘Thrive’ campaign on African agriculture.
Housemates also had to design T-shirts for ‘Thrive’. Thrive-related tasks were ongoing
when, on one July day, with most of the housemates bearing the ONE logo on their
chests, there on the big screen from where Big Brother normally addressed the housemates
appeared a Thrive logo, followed by a video of Bono. He was beamed in, on tape, straight
from Dublin, speaking bland phrases of encouragement, Big Brother personified. The full
Orwellian effect, whereby words mean the opposite of what they should really mean, was
underlined by the giant ‘RESPECT’ flashing electronically beneath his visage. Obviously
aware, albeit insufficiently, of the relationship implied by his appearance in this role, he
blathered, to the accompanying fast-moving video graphics: ‘This is your Irish rock star
fan, Bono. You are my big brothers and little sisters.’ He continued: ‘I hear that you’re
growing and farming the future, and that the fruit is the hope and change that we’re all
hungry for.’

Here was Bono, back where he had started so modestly in Ethiopia twenty-seven years
before, entertainingly telling Africans how to grow their food, but now coming through
in rapid jump-cuts, dressed in full celebrity regalia, for a European TV-show franchise
specifically designed to bring out, and display, the worst in people, and speaking –
vaguely, but in the context of the visuals and the show, unquestionably – on behalf of an
agricultural partnership that included Monsanto, in soundbytes borrowed from Obama.

‘This is so surreal, I cannot believe it,’ a housemate said, in apparent awe. But you’d better
believe it: it’s all too real.
Notes

2 ‘Leadership at a Time of Transition and Turbulence – A Conversation with Peter Sutherland KCMG’, Gresham College, 8 March 2011, at gresham.ac.uk.
6 ‘Give Us the Money’.
8 Ibid.
11 I am indebted to Eric C. Lott, whose stimulating paper at the UCD Clinton Institute conference on ‘Ireland and African America’ in March 2012 dealt with Springsteen’s induction speech for U2. The usual disclaimer applies about Lott’s views being distinct from mine.
12 One of Dublin’s favourite ‘Bruce Springsteen is a lovely fella’ stories, told again and again when his name is mentioned, recounts his very kind behaviour, when he was out in a restaurant with Bono, to fans who were seeking photos and autographs from Bono without recognising Springsteen.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
25 Quoted in ibid.
26 ‘U2’s Bono Talks Curbing Hunger with NBC’s Andrea Mitchell’, *First Read*, 18 May 2012.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
33 See for example the passage in Chapter 2 that describes Robert Pollin’s measurement of the failure of the Bono–Paul O’Neill approach to development when gauged beside an earlier developmental-state model, which had become ‘unthinkable’ since the 1980s because of an ideological assault from neoliberalism.
35 See for example the end of “Give Us the Money,” Why Poverty? (BBC Four, 25 November 2012).
37 See Lorna Siggins, Once Upon a Time in the West: The Corrib Gas Controversy (Dublin: Transworld Ireland, 2010).
40 Dervla King, A Needs Analysis of Asylum Seekers Resident in Kilmarnock House, Killiney (Southside Partnership, May 2004).
41 SMS message to author, 4 December 2012.
42 ‘Give Us the Money’.
45 “‘Attention Housemates, This Is Bono’: U2 Front Man Makes Guest Appearance on Big Brother Africa’, Independent.ie, 26 July 2012, at independent.ie.
Part 3

Popular Resistance
Chapter 3.1
Springsteen at the Borders

a. ‘Bruce Springsteen’s Devils and Dust’, CounterPunch April 23 2005
b. ‘Springsteen polishes his roots’, CounterPunch April 22 2006 (with C.A. Cullen)
c. ‘Sinister Magic: Bruce Springsteen Comes Home… to Hell’, CounterPunch September 25 2007
d. ‘Bring Out Your Dead: Bruce Springsteen’s Irish Wake’ CounterPunch March 24 2012

Co-authorship on 3.1b is clearly divided and requires no special statement.

a) CounterPunch April 23, 2005
Bruce Springsteen’s ‘Devils and Dust’

Up until last year, Bruce Springsteen had been quietly taking sound political stands for most of three decades, including No Nukes in 1979, through support for striking workers and benefits for food banks, the Christic Institute, you name it. He had shunned all opportunities for corporate selling-out. He had released two deep, dark, mostly acoustic albums probing poverty, alienation and injustice in America; the second, The Ghost of Tom Joad (1995) was a pointed pinprick to the bubbly pseudo-liberalism of the mid-Clinton era.

Then in 2004, like many’s another decent left-liberal, he jumped on the asinine Anybody But Bush bandwagon, endorsing and campaigning for John Kerry. Reading much of the ill-informed commentary, most of it admiring, you’d think he had nailed his colours to the mast for the first time — when in fact what he had done was wash them out. (His anti-war stance was more forthright than Kerry’s — faint praise indeed — but he followed most Dems’ lead in forgetting to mention that any actual Iraqis were dying in Iraq.) Yes, some conservative fans who had been trying to ignore the left politics in his life and work since the Seventies expressed annoyance, even betrayal, at
his partisanship; but for many of us on the left it was more distressing to see Springsteen, whose 9/11-inspired *The Rising* (2002) was astonishingly nuanced as well as frankly commercial, turn himself into a huckster for a mainstream pol.

Okay, now that overheated election campaign is done and dusted, *Devils & Dust* doesn’t go there. In fact, anyone awaiting this album to hear Springsteen’s State of the Union address, hoping either to bury or praise it, will be disappointed: it’s arguably less overtly political than either *The Rising* or *Tom Joad*, and Springsteen freely admits that most of its songs, predominantly slow and acoustic, were written in the Nineties as he toured solo, in Guthrie-without-the-fun mode, showcasing the Joad material. They’re broadly similar to the range of his work from that decade, especially *Tom Joad*, bits of *Lucky Town* and the last disc of the outtake box-set, *Tracks*: a mix of gritty story-songs and rockers evoking domestic mostly-contentment. (The grittiest story-song strays far enough from the contentment to merit a Parental Advisory sticker: in ‘Reno’ a prostitute addresses the narrator, “Two hundred dollars straight in,/ Two-fifty up the ass, she smiled and said”. The narrator, a heartbroken Mexican immigrant, appears to opt for nothing more daring than fellatio and woman-on-top. Phew.)

The title track, written at the time of the Iraq invasion, narrated by a US soldier and ironically invoking “God on our side”, is the one big nod to topicality, A sad and lovely song, similar to ‘Blood Brothers’ (1995) both in its music and in its male-bonding, its main ‘political’ significance is the chorus’s reference to the ‘fear’ meme beloved of liberal commentators like Michael Moore: “Fear’s a powerful thing/ That’ll turn your heart black you can trust/ It’ll take your God filled soul/ Fill it with devils and dust”.

The song ultimately seems more concerned with Christian metaphysics than politics, and given its myriad references to Bob Dylan (the narrator’s buddy is called Bob, and there’s “wind blowing” as well as the aforementioned God-on-our-side), it’s bemusing
to recall how Dylan was critically lashed for his Christian turn in the late Seventies. Springsteen, who way back then was using religious language and imagery in largely subversive ways (‘Adam Raised a Cain’, or the earthy, earthly seduction of ‘Thunder Road’: “All the redemption I can offer, girl/Is beneath this dirty hood”), is now a full-blown faith-based rocker, and is scarcely mocked for it. The Rising at least incorporated hints of liberation theology, with its final exhortation, in ‘My City of Ruins’: “Come on, rise up!” Devils & Dust offers few such obvious consolations to the secular left, though the religion is hardly of the born-again variety: in the title track Springsteen sings “tonight faith just ain’t enough/ When I look inside my heart/ There is just devils and dust”. (On The Rising, ‘Paradise’, sung partly from the perspective of a suicide bomber, ended with the simile “as empty as paradise”).

Then there’s ‘Jesus Was An Only Son’, shot through with as much Marian devotion and love for Christ’s final suffering as that Mel Gibson movie. (Mother-love and loss also run through ‘Silver Palomino’ and ‘Black Cowboys’.) However, Springsteen’s song manages to reminds us what was missed by both The Passion of the Christ and the critics who saw Passion-passion as some kinky right-wing obsession: that reverence for the Redeemer’s blood is probably most common among people who have known deep suffering themselves — notably in the tradition of African-American Christianity.

And here’s where the cultural politics of this album start to sneak up on you. Springsteen is using, and making claims upon, such a tradition. This shouldn’t seem strange: all the great thinking white rock & rollers eventually go looking for their blues and gospel roots. (Mr Zimmerman of Minnesota famously wore whiteface make-up on stage in what was surely a twisted comment on his music’s racial origins and his own minstrelry.) Springsteen has a better claim than most, with black musicians in his band dating back 30-odd years, to its roots in multi-racial Asbury Park; when he dropped the E-Streeters in the early Nineties his new touring band was mostly black. He has sung
specifically and pointedly about racial politics on ‘American Skin (41 Shots)’ (though an Irish friend of mine quibbles that it was presumptuous of Bruce to assign American skin to the West African Amadou Diallo).

And yet Springsteen has often seemed somehow the whitest of white musicians. Before *The Rising*, only his weakest album, *Human Touch* (1992), looked for a consistently soulful sound. Certainly his US audiences are conspicuously low on pigmentation: his great saxophonist Clarence Clemons often seems to be the only African-American present even among 50,000 people at a stadium gig. Springsteen and Clemons make the most of the latter’s dramatic black presence, playing on stereotypes and engaging in sexy/funny onstage homoerotic flirtation, but the ultimate political significance of tens of thousands of upper-middle-class white folks shouting “Big Man!” is certainly up for grabs, at best.

While Springsteen had sung about African-Americans and immigrants on *Tom Joad* and ‘American Skin’, *The Rising* was his boldest effort to incorporate their musical styles, most obvious in the gospel choruses. On *Devils & Dust* he does something rather different again: with the music itself more low-key, he adopts their voices. The characters narrating a few of these songs are surely Latino and black, and the idiom is often that of country blues. The other day a Dublin radio station played Willie Nelson and Ray Charles singing ‘Seven Spanish Angels’, and that, it seemed to me, is something like what Springsteen is trying to do here in one voice. It’s most obvious, because most enhanced by a skipping beat, in the spacious world of ‘All I’m Thinkin’ About’, where his country-ish tenor moves an octave higher and he seeks freedom, like the Grateful Dead only better, in a Southern rural and urban landscape filled with black and brown:

Black car shinin’ on a Sunday morn
Mama go to church now, Mama go to church now
Saturday night daddy’s shirt is torn
Daddy’s goin’ downtown, daddy’s goin’ downtown
Ain’t no one understand this sweet thing we do
All I’m thinkin’ about is you, baby…

A couple of songs capture the theme most explicitly. ‘Black Cowboys’ is the story of a kid from the south Bronx whose mother tries to keep him clean and enhance his self-esteem with poignant reading material: “there was a channel showed a western movie everyday Lynette brought him home books on the black cowboys of the Oklahoma range and the Seminole scouts that fought the tribes of the Great Plains”. Eventually it is she rather than he who succumbs to “the Mott Haven streets”, so the kid steals $500 from her drug-dealer boyfriend and gets the train to Oklahoma, in vague hope of resurrection. The allusion to the little-known African-American heritage of the Wild West, and the character’s lithe slip across the appointed frontier of his life, are markers in Springsteen’s own attempt to cross borders.

The US-Mexican border — a “scar”, Springsteen has called it in his concerts — was central to Tom Joad, and it’s back here in several songs. The last of them, ‘Matamoros Banks’, is partly a love song that simply enjoys the rise and fall of a beautiful word: “Meet me on the Matamoros/ Meet me on the Matamoros/ Meet me on the Matamoros banks”. There’s even a momentary lyrical pleasure in the notion that, on the American continent, a place called Matamoros lies across a river from a place called Brownsville. But what lies between Matamoros and Brownsville is a deadly frontier, a stretch of the Rio Grande where hundreds of would-be immigrants have drowned:

“For two days the river keeps you down
Then you rise to the light without a sound
Pass the playgrounds and the empty switching yards
The turtles eat the skin from your eyes, so they lay open to the stars
Your clothes give way to the current and river stone
’Til every trace of who you ever were is gone
And the things of the earth they make their claim
That the things of heaven may do the same
Beautiful and affecting as all this is, of course there must be some question about Bruce Springsteen, the liberal rock star, a very rich white man for most of his adult life, a product of suburban (albeit working-class suburban) New Jersey, adopting these stories, these roots, as though they were his own. If you didn’t have them already, the DVD side of this “DualDisc” release — or at least as much of it as I got to see in my “preview” of the album — brings the questions forward in stark relief. Film-maker Danny Clinch, without apparent irony or parody, presents Springsteen singing and talking about his songs with a rootsy, artily artless visual aesthetic that would make Johnny Cash or Robert Johnson blush. The title card has even been “weathered” to look like it’s on a scratchy old film print, and Springsteen appears in an empty, half-painted house, dimly lit, the image suddenly saturated as a piece of jewellery or the capo being attached to the neck of a guitar catches a slanting sun beam.

Bruce Springsteen, the ordinary guy who sings songs about ordinary guys, has been recast, and gold-plated, as an original piece of rare, vintage Americana. Some people just won’t buy it: the charge of phoniness has hung around him for most of his career, with critic Robert Palmer famously writing in 1978, paraphrasing the Beatlemania ad, that his work was “not rock ’n’ roll, but an incredible simulation”. (Palmer recanted in 1980 in praise of The River.) The charge of over-preciousness about himself and his work has stuck still more surely.

As a Jersey boy myself, I can’t help feeling that our state’s own mestizo accent and aesthetic should have been good enough for him. But in fairness, Springsteen has earned his claim on the cowboy gear and country blues, and on his own place in the tradition. After all, ask many of the “authentic” roots musicians to name the important works of the late 20th-century, and Nebraska (1982) is likely to turn up on the list.
More importantly, perhaps, is that for all his allusions and derivations, he stands up as a songwriter of originality, brilliance and craft, with a long body of work that, for those who know it well, carries wonderful connections, characters, themes and echoes across the decades. Here, for example, ‘All the Way Home’ recapitulates 1987’s ‘Tougher than the Rest’, and ‘Long Time Comin’’ offers both a long-awaited happy ending to 1973’s ‘Rosalita’, and an optimistic prayer, addressed to the narrator’s children, to answer 1978’s ‘Adam Raised a Cain’, which lamented that “you’re born into this life payin’/ For the sins of somebody else’s past”:

Well if I had one wish in this god forsaken world kids
It’d be that your mistakes ’ould be your own
That your sins ’ould be your own

Amen to that, Brother Bruce, amen.

b) CounterPunch April 22, 2006
Springsteen Polishes His Roots

Harry: Back before Bruce Springsteen had recorded an album, Pete Seeger was a domestic god in our New Jersey home.

A stack of well-worn LPs was spun and spun again on an old black box phonograph, and on them Seeger sang songs that bridged adult and childhood worlds. (To this day my family’s favourite, politically charged version of ‘This Land is Your Land’ is by Seeger on an album he made with the cast of Sesame Street.) My dad was himself a left-wing activist of some repute, and spoke lovingly of Seeger and some personal contact they’d had when, as I recall, Seeger was campaigning to clean up the Hudson River and Dad was a radical priest on the Upper West Side.

Then came Bruce, and a new hi-fi, to provide the soundtrack for my life from adolescence onward, and (eventually) to bridge the generation gap back up to my mother after my father died. The only personal contact I’ve ever had with Springsteen
was a fans-meet-rock-star-outside-hotel episode in Dublin, 1988, that left my brother and I so irrationally disappointed and angry that we went on a day-long drinking binge to purge it. Nonetheless, his songs have been present at every twist and turn, joy and sorrow in my life, including those involving the left-wing activism they rarely seemed to reference. When, near the end of this lovely new album, I heard his voice softly massaging ‘We Shall Overcome’, did the congruence and incongruity bring a tear to my sentimental Irish-Sicilian-Neapolitan eye? Forget about it. I blubbered uncontrollably.

**Catherine:** Although I grew up in Ireland, I reached my milestones to a soundtrack of Pete Seeger and anyone else who ever plucked a tune at the Newport Folk Festival. Sometimes it was my dad singing the songs to his own guitar, sometimes it was a disc of black vinyl on the crackly record-player which had three settings, for 33s, 45s and 78s. Our extended family was full of singers and musicians, and when we got together for a wedding or a funeral, the party-pieces were protest songs and ballads. Songs like ‘We Shall Overcome’ sounded different then, as if the world they aspired to was just around the corner. It would take just a few more voices, a few more people holding hands in the circle. Nearly half a century later, what strikes me on hearing Bruce’s versions of ‘Overcome’ and ‘Eyes on the Prize’ is that the prize seems farther away now, and the weariness in his voice on those songs in particular is hard to bear. I am overcome, but I haven’t, and we haven’t.

**Harry:** In fairness, Bruce is not exactly a stranger to the world of agit-folk. He was a part-time guitar-strumming folkie before his first album; in 1979 he played ‘No Nukes’; in 1980-81 he sent arena-rock audiences scurrying for the toilets when he talked from the stage about Woody Guthrie (he’d just read Joe Klein’s biography) and played a funereal solo-acoustic version of ‘This Land’; two great, mostly acoustic albums, *Nebraska* and *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, are folk-ish in their heartbreaking observations of poverty and alienation in Reagan and Clinton’s America, though they are bereft of
folkly sing-along pleasures; he’s turned up on Guthrie and Seeger tribute compilations; a 1992 song, ‘The Big Muddy’, transforms the central image of Seeger’s Vietnam allegory (‘Waist Deep in the Big Muddy’) into a series of vignettes about personal corruptibility; much of his recent work, especially Devils & Dust, is inflected with folk as well as gospel and blues influences. And then of course there’s his political campaigning Still, when the DVD of Devils & Dust cast this millionaire Jersey rock-star as a down-home roots musician, wandering alone through an empty house with rings and guitar strings flashing in the shadowy light, I couldn’t resist a sneer here in CounterPunch. This time around, for the Seeger Sessions, Springsteen has filled a house with musicians of undeniable ‘authenticity’ and filled a CD with traditional, sing-along folk and gospel songs. And he has used as his touchstone Pete Seeger, a prep-school and Harvard lad who didn’t let his elite (albeit left-elite) upbringing get in the way of his identification with the language and concerns of oppressed people—and whose integrity survived his brush with the pop-charts (as a member of the Weavers) in the early 1950s. Nice call, Bruce.

Anyway, Pete Seeger has had a good year. He emerged as an unlikely hero of Martin Scorsese’s Dylan documentary, No Direction Home. (‘Unlikely’ because rock-oriented Dylanography has tended to take a dimmer view.) Dave Marsh dedicates his superb liner notes for the new Springsteen album (5,000-plus words of song-by-song social history) to another hero of that programme, the recently deceased folk ‘sage’ Harold Leventhal. Dylan claims implausibly in No Direction Home that in the early Sixties he didn’t know Seeger was a communist, indeed he didn’t even know what a communist was. At this stage Bruce Springsteen can’t possibly lay claim to any such naivety, so it’s a genuinely, and gratuitously, bold move for him to identify himself so clearly with an icon of the American left, especially when so many of his fans would rather compare
him with Bob Seger than Pete Seeger. In light of this choice, one can only wonder if Springsteen’s shilling for John Kerry was just a new incarnation of the Popular Front?

In interviews and his own album notes Bruce steers clear of talking politics: “turn it up, put on your dancin’ and singin’ shoes, and have fun”. Starting the album with the hoe-down of ‘Old Dan Tucker’ and ending it with the apparent childish nonsense of ‘Froggie Went a-Courting’ seems designed to show us this is all good clean trivia.

Catherine: You can’t have a folk album without a fool, or should I say a Fool. Enter Old Dan Tucker, “yer too later to git yer supper”, a man who “combs his hair with a wagon wheel” in the same way that one anti-hero of Irish folksong combs his with the leg of a chair which he then “takes to bed as a teddy-bear”. It’s a sort of a come-all-ye, with smatterings of dance songs: “First to the right and then to the left/ Then to the girl that he loves best.” But maybe ‘Old Dan Tucker’ has something more to say to Americans in these sad old days: “Supper’s gone, Dinner’s cooking/ Old Dan Tucker just stands there looking.”

Is it just possible that in this album peppered with statement songs, there’s a reference here to Someone who ‘just stood there looking’, with his vacuous grin, when a little intellectual activity was called for?

Harry: To my mind, last year’s ‘Devils & Dust’, drawing on blues and gospel imagery in a first-person account of soldiering in Iraq, was a noble but failed attempt at an anti-war song. Whatever he’s actually writing these days, it seems that for the moment Springsteen’s constantly renewed quest to combine the personal with the prophetic (a quest completed with almost unbelievable success on his post-9/11 record, The Rising) is best pursued through these old ballads and spirituals. Because, of course, We Shall Overcome is deeply political and concerned with present-day events, especially the war in Iraq and the enduring racial oppression exposed by Hurricane Katrina.
The Irish ballad ‘Mrs McGrath’ features a denunciation of foreign wars and a conversation between a mother and her amputee son that could take place in Walter Reed Hospital. ‘Oh, Mary Don’t You Weep’, besides taking Bruce over his MMM (Minimum Mentions of ‘Mary’) threshold, features a great military machine coming acropper in the Middle East: “Pharoah’s army got drown-ded”. And Katrina’s ‘drown-ded’, and survivors, are present in the next few songs: ‘Erie Canal’ is recast as a New Orleans funeral march; ‘Jacob’s Ladder’ is a powerful black spiritual of ascent and triumph through endurance; ‘My Oklahoma Home’ is about a Dust Bowl refugee but carries echoes of the Gulf Coast – also, its echoes of Springsteen’s own work, especially ‘The River’ and ‘The Promised Land’, are positively eerie.

Catherine: ‘Mrs McGrath’ (which over here we pronounce to rhyme with ‘Baa’) is infused with the blackest of humour. “Now was you drunk or was you blind/ When you left your two fine legs behind?” It set me thinking that England has few such ballads of disenchantment with war and the army, though many songs of loves lost on the battlefield. One rare example is ‘Arthur McBride’, which dates from the early half of the nineteenth century. Adapted and adopted as an Irish song, it is a less-than-pacifist anti-recruitment song, where Arthur and his cousin, targeted by a recruiting officer, beat up the offending sergeant and lighten the load of his drummer-boy: “And as for the weapons that hung by their side/ We flung them as far as we could in the tide.” Ireland has many and more grim anti-war songs of her own, including Mrs McGrath’s cousin, ‘Johnny, I Hardly Knew You’: “Where are your legs that used to run/ When you went for to carry a gun?/ Indeed your dancing days are done!/ Oh Johnny, I hardly knew ye.” ‘Pharoah’s Army Got Drownded’, as it was called then, got the kiss of life at the Newport Folk Festival in 1964, and the version I know is the one sung there by the Swan Silverstones of Caretta, West Virginia. ‘Mary don’t you weep, Martha don’t you
moan’ goes their refrain. Bruce leaves out Martha, but on an album of toe-tappers, ‘Mary’ gets your whole foot stompin’. Both feet, even.

**Harry**: Among the other songs, there’s ‘Jesse James’: Bruce has a kid called Jesse, and it’s good to remind listeners that the popular-music celebration of outlawry didn’t start with gangstas; plus the song features the most perfect, irresistible lyric of praise for a good man: “He’d a hand and a heart and a brain.” (Still, I prefer the crazed vitality of the Pogues’ version, left off Marsh’s list of other covers.)

**Catherine**: When I hear the opening bars of ‘Jesse James’, I always find it hard not to sing the version of Woody Guthrie’s song, ‘Jesus Christ’, recorded by my Uncle Gerry of the Voice Squad. But Jesse is a fine subject for a ballad too, and not the first outlaw to make it into the songbooks – Robin Hood gets whole chapters to himself in ballad histories. I learnt to finger-pick this on a guitar about 20 years ago, and my fingers are still smokin’. ‘Jesse’ and ‘John Henry’ (which also featured in my flat-picking primer) are to me two of the trinity of quintessential American folk-hero songs, along with ‘Casey Jones’. One of the ballad books I have suggests that John Henry features in Jamaican hammer songs older than any found in the US. But that’s another story.

**Harry**: John Henry’s tragic steel-driving race with a steam drill has never sounded more like a metaphor for the position of the musician in an era of corporate culture. Springsteen also personalises ‘Eyes on the Prize’: the civil-rights anthem becomes, in part, a ballad of Bruce’s emerging commitment, as his voice emerges from solitude into a ringing gospel chorus, with a crucial lyrical choice of the singular first-person pronoun – “The only thing I did was wrong/ Stayin’ in the wilderness too long”, then, swellingly, “The only thing we did was right/ Was the day we started to fight.”

*We Shall Overcome* sounds great. Bruce improved the *Devils & Dust* material when he performed it acoustically on tour, and the acoustic band here is wonderful. The internet
E Street nostalgists may not like it, and they have a powerful *Rising* tour to back up their preferences, but to my mind 21st-century Springsteen is at his best without a rock band.

If I’ve got a quibble, it’s with Springsteen’s voice – an instrument I’ve been defending against all complaints for three decades. Occasionally on records, and more often in concert, we’ve heard the great vocal range he has developed over the years. On this album he pretty much growls like, well, like Bruce Springsteen. It sounds like he’s taking his task of singing these songs very seriously indeed. Good.

In most cases it works fine. But there’s a great warmth and humour that usually lurks in Seeger’s singing, and indeed in that of Woody Guthrie, which helps to leaven the pain of the material. As anyone who has heard his between-song patter knows delightfully, Bruce is not short of warmth and humour, but mostly he fails to locate it in his singing voice.

**Catherine:** Among certain folksingers and their fans there’s a strong anti-embellishment movement, and I have to count myself among them. It’s the song that’s important, right?–this song that has come down through generations of fireside, kitchen-sink or open air singers–and it’s nothing short of presumptuous for some jumped-up primo uomo or prima donna to start adding little trills here or there or showing off their high notes there. Look, we know we’re fuddy-duddy and hopelessly contradictory in our views, because without different personalities imposing themselves on the songs, we wouldn’t have all those intriguing versions.

Anyway, it seems to me that Bruce may be coming from a similar place when he sings these songs, and it’s a place that’s more than a little uneasy for someone who has made singing his songs his way a lifetime’s work. So sometimes he sounds just a bit stiff or
lacking in punch, but what he’s really doing is trying to let the songs take over. That’s my theory.

As for Froggy, Bruce is going right back to one of the oldest ballads we know to end his selection. The first mention of the song is in *The Complaint of Scotland* in 1549, and a ballad called ‘A Moste Strange Wedding of the fFrogge and the Mouse’ was lodged with the Company of Stationers in London (then the copyright registry) in 1580. There are possibly thousands of versions, most of them featuring more bloodthirsty endings than Bruce has featured here. The classic English one has the chorus, “Heigh, ho, said Anthony Rowleigh”, and ends with the rat and mouse expiring at the paws of a family of cats. The frog escapes homeward, but as he crosses a bridge he too meets his end, down the throat of a lily-white duck. On our CD shelves we have two Irish versions, one of which has no frog at all, for only “Uncle Rat went out to ride”. The other has a rousing Irish chorus of “Follow ta right ta leary-o, Tatin tareea taranday”. Both have the guests bringing musical instruments rather than food or drink for the party – “the first came in was a bumble bee, with his fiddle upon his knee.” In ‘Uncle Rat’, the party comes a cropper when a tabby cat arrives and breaks the mouse’s back. In the other version, a wasp gets up to sing and stings the fiddle-player, and that’s just the start of the mayhem. Luckily Bruce’s version has the snake merely chasing the guests into the lake, whence they presumably will emerge only dampened.

His final verse, one beloved of folksongs everywhere, tells you that “if you want anymore you can sing it yourself”. How else do you end an album of songs like these?

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Sinister Magic: Bruce Springsteen comes home… to hell

There are a few ways you can be both a political artist and a rock-star, and Bruce Springsteen has been trying them out for almost four decades now. You can write songs
that adopt and/or explore the perspectives of people without power. You can offer moral and financial support to progressive causes, mostly low-key and local. You can go on the stump nationally for a presidential candidate. You can trawl the folk tradition and try to revive interest in some of its more radical manifestations--and while you’re at it you can take an archival curiosity like ‘How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?’ and reshape it into a great and bitter song about New Orleans and Katrina.

Springsteen hasn’t so far taken the Neil Young approach – release an evidently heartfelt but often risible collection of agitprop songs in the apparent hope they’ll become the soundtrack for a (nonexistent) mass movement. (That was Young last year; this year is sure to be different.) And because Springsteen again avoids that tack on his new album, *Magic*, there has been a murmur afoot, since the album leaked on the internet in early September, that Bruce has (in the words of New York magazine’s Vulture blog) “gotten the politics out of his system.”

Politics for Springsteen is not, however, some infection to be purged, but apparently a part of his intrinsic make-up. Despite only a song or two that can remotely be said to be ‘about’ particular issues, and despite the absence of the lovingly detailed wretched-off-the-earth who occupied *The Ghost of Tom Joad* and *Devils & Dust*, *Magic* is a devastatingly political record, if not always in the predictable ways. It is, for one thing, permeated with war, foreign and domestic, present and past. If this artist has spent two decades wandering the highways and byways of America in search of sounds and stories and themes, on *Magic* Bruce Springsteen comes home, to New Jersey (no more drawl), to rock & roll (the E Street Band denser than on any record since *Born to Run*), to the Sixties (for what is more homely than our memories of the period of our own youth?). And home – the home-front, if you like – turns out to be apparently comforting but also fraught, a place of lying, cheating, misunderstanding, and clinging on for dear life.
On Magic, the words ‘Vietnam’ and ‘Iraq’ are never sung, but the two wars and the two eras shout out to each other across the musical din. Partly this is about the sound: with the help of Brendan O’Brien’s almost monaural production, we hear bits of Sixties pop, including a big dose of Beach Boys that should help us place the slightly bitter sweetness of ‘Girls in Their Summer Clothes’ firmly in the narrator’s distant past: the song’s portrait of a buzzing small town makes it a companion piece to ‘Long Walk Home’, where we hear about the same place in countrified 21st-century alienation mode. (In ‘Girls’, a waitress brings coffee and says “Penny for your thoughts”; in ‘Long Walk Home’, the diner is “shuttered and boarded with a sign that just said ‘gone’.”)

But the album’s sounds are also of the present day, including echoes of the acts who in turn owe so much to Springsteen: Arcade Fire, the Killers, Lucinda Williams. Even the resonant orchestral sound of Irish-ironist band The Divine Comedy is audible on a couple of tracks. Those who insist on caricaturing him as a musical conservative should at least note how Springsteen’s last project started with a tribute to Pete Seeger and ended up sounding like the Pogues.

On first listen, especially to the lyrics of ‘Long Walk Home’, there is more than a faint whiff of nostalgia here, political and otherwise:

My father said “Son, we’re lucky in this town,
It’s a beautiful place to be born.
It just wraps its arms around you,
Nobody crowds you, nobody goes it alone
The flag flyin’ over the courthouse
Means certain things are set in stone.
Who we are and what we’ll do and what we won’t”

But sniff again. The nostalgia for the golden community of a past generation that seems to permeate ‘Long Walk Home’ and that is implied in much of ‘Girls in Their Summer Clothes’ is undercut sharply by ‘Gypsy Biker’, which precedes ‘Girls’ on the album. ‘Gypsy Biker’ is a lament for a friend killed in war, and there’s no reason to say it isn’t
in Iraq – the friend has been sent “over the hill” with the cry “victory for the righteous”, and the benefit going to “profiteers” and speculators”–but the wailing rock guitars, and the emotion in Springsteen’s wailing voice, reach back 35 years or more. The biker culture that is invoked as the dead man’s friends “pulled your cycle up out of the garage and polished up the chrome” (itself a line echoing from an Eighties Springsteen song about a Vietnam vet, ‘Shut Out the Light’) then burn it in the desert is emblematic of the Vietnam era, though that culture persists to this day. The evocation of domestic turmoil about the war (“This whole town’s been rousted / Which side are you on?”) is, unfortunately, more redolent of 1970 than 2007.

Even the idea of Springsteen writing about a Gypsy Biker after decades in which his white working-class characters have mostly been rather blander, bleached into some version of universality, is something of a throwback to the early Seventies.

In short, the beloved Gypsy Biker may have been killed in Vietnam, or in Iraq. Being a fictional character, indeed, he may have died in both wars. Either way, “To them that threw you away, you ain’t nothing but gone.”

To Springsteen, product of the Sixties, the personal is political. The album starts with a sort of animating first track, ‘Radio Nowhere’, a largely successful attempt at a kick-ass declaration of life-in-the-old-guy-yet, as the narrator, “trying to find my way home”, rocks through a familiar Springsteen lexicon of location and desperation in search of human and musical connection. It’s not hard to hear “Is there anybody alive out there?” as a plaintive cry about Life During Bushtime. Then the next three tracks are apparently ‘relationship’ songs that might not be out of place on 1987’s marriage-on-the-rocks album, _Tunnel of Love_. Given that the present Mrs Springsteen, Patti Scialfa, has just released _Play It as It Lays_, a fine album of often cuttingly intimate new songs that must
have Bruce blushing and squirming even more than other long-lasting husbands who happen to hear it, it’s tempting to listen to these songs for his side of the story.

But unlike on *Tunnel of Love*, he keeps inserting lyrics that indicate wider significance. ‘You’ll Be Comin’ Down’ and ‘Your Own Worst Enemy’ are titles it’s easy enough to politicize, and the words oblige. The self-loathing you-cum-I of the latter song is uncertain of his social identity, his place in the world. “The times they got too clear / So you removed all the mirrors… Your flag it flew so high / It drifted into the sky.” The protagonist of these songs could easily be the United States of America – this sequence almost ends up sounding like a joke about the intense identification between Springsteen and his country that has trailed him since ‘Born in the USA’.

He has most fun with this murky idea on ‘Livin’ in the Future’. (It’s true, Springsteen has rarely meet a letter-G he couldn’t drop.) A pop-rocking tune in ‘Hungry Heart’ mode, and again ostensibly about a troubled relationship, its chorus is a paradox and an instant classic in the annals of false comfort:

Don’t worry, darlin’
No baby don’t you fret
We’re livin’ in the future and
None of this has happened yet

If only. The second verse reminds us that Springsteen, as John Kerry’s musical mascot, had a peculiar stake in the last presidential poll. The narrator wakes on election day, whistles the time away…

Then just about sun down
You come walkin’ through town
Your boot heels clickin’ like
The barrel of a pistol spinnin’ round

I wonder who that could be? Yet on an Internet message board for Springsteen fans, a contributor get roasted for suggesting this song is political. Sadly, or perhaps magically,
once the E Street Band starts touring next week, there will be arenas full of people bopping to this song as though its chorus could somehow be literally true.

By its end ‘Livin’ in the Future’ is at least in part a self-parodying memoir of Springsteen’s failed electoral venture:

I opened up my heart to you
It got all damaged and undone
My ship Liberty sailed away
On a bloody red horizon
The groundskeeper opened the gates
And let the wild dogs run
...
My faith’s been torn asunder
Tell me is that rollin’ thunder
Or just the sinkin’ sound
Of somethin’ righteous goin’ under

‘Righteous’ is a word that crops up more than once on Magic – though not as often as the keynote, ‘home’ – and while the charge of righteousness sometimes seems to refer to the American political posture, one senses that Springsteen is also pointing the finger at himself.

The John Kerry relationship re-appears, as does the Vietnam connection, in more obvious form in ‘Last to Die’, the album’s clearest polemical song ‘about’ Iraq and the first in a three-song suite that closes the album with deadly serious State-of-the-Union intent, albeit with continuing vibrations of personal politics. ‘Last to Die’ is a sketch, drawn from inside the traditional Springsteenian bubble of a car driving away from something (and toward “Truth or Consequences”) on some American road – a sketch of the home-front’s alienation from the terrible reality of war and of the rending of the social fabric. (“Things fall apart,” he sings, inviting us to fill in the rest of Yeats’ ‘The Second Coming’, which funnily enough was also a feature of the final episodes of The Sopranos. It’s a Jersey thing.) From the car radio comes a voice, “some other voice
from long ago,” and the chorus that follows is lifted, loosely, from John Kerry’s brilliant 1971 testimony to the Senate foreign-relations committee:

Who’ll be the last to die for a mistake
The last to die for a mistake
Whose blood will spill, whose heart will break
Who’ll be the last to die for a mistake

(At least the narrator is not listening to Radio Nowhere; more like WBAI.)

Except that he tells us Kerry’s voice is from “long ago”, ‘Last to Die’ is another song that could be set a generation ago. As it is, however, the chorus needs to be sung today precisely because Kerry and his ilk now lack of the courage of their earlier convictions.

“We don’t measure the blood we’ve drawn any more,” Springsteen sings. “We just stack the bodies outside the door.” As the guitars drop away momentarily, from the car there is a glimpse of reality, perhaps a news promo seen in the window of a TV shop:

A downtown window flushed with light
“Faces of the dead at five”
A martyr’s silent eyes
Petition the drivers as we pass by

The song concludes in full rock & roll roar with a vision of “tyrants and kings… strung up at your city gates,” so maybe Bruce won’t be going the electoral route in 2008.

It isn’t the only vision on this album, which has more elements of prophecy than propaganda. Even the ‘love song’, ‘I’ll Work for Your Love’, is an ode to a bar-waitress written as a half-jokey exercise in extended religious metaphor:

Pour me a drink, Teresa, in one of those glasses you dust off
And I’ll watch the bones in your back like the Stations of the Cross

The last song, ‘Devil’s Arcade’, is the among the album’s most literal: a lover recalls portentous, and passionate, youthful episodes with a man, then tells the story of than man enlisting, being wounded, probably by an IED (“Just metal and plastic where your body caved”), being hospitalised and returning home to fragile life, “the beat of your
heart” repeatedly seven spine-tingling times over a slow rhythm. But there are meanings that are harder, in every sense: the Devil’s Arcade could be the war, but Springsteen also uses the phrase as he describes the characters’ first sexual experiences. This is no simple and simplistic exercise in painting devil’s horns on George W. Bush.

Springsteen has rarely been so difficult. At its most challenging, Magic is an attack on American cruelty and pretensions, on the indifference of its political class; but it is also a continuation of the occasional auto-critique that in the last two decades has seen him write scathingly about “a rich man in a poor man’s shirt” (‘Better Days’) or admit that “The highway is alive tonight / But nobody’s kidding nobody about where it goes” (‘The Ghost of Tom Joad’). The name of the album, Magic, draws attention to his self-referential intent: no words in the Springsteen Canon are more beloved than the audience sing-along line from ‘Thunder Road’: “Show a little faith, there’s magic in the night...” But here, magic is something entirely more sinister.

The slow title track is sung from the perspective of a conjuror who runs the listener through his ominous bag of tricks, including his capacity to escape the “shackles on my wrists” that are probably the most potent global symbol of today’s USA. “Trust none of what you hear / And less of what you see,” he then sings, and the political meaning for media consumers is clear enough. But with the song’s passing references to a river and a rising, you also sense something of a personal confession. That Magic publicity shot of 58-year-old Springsteen with a biologically unlikely full head of thick dark hair, wearing tough-guy chains and clutching the old Telecaster, its famed wood veneer cracked with age--is that just another untrustworthy image from the Magician’s PR department?

On an album of screaming guitars, crying sax and mourning organ, one that often feels haunted by perdition, at best, and apocalypse, at worst, the song ‘Magic’ takes the most
directly prophetic form, every verse ending with “This is what will be.” And, as always, prophecy is not about the future. Springsteen reads America’s past, the ‘strange fruit’ of racist lynchings echoed in the disaster of Katrina, the spectre of domestic refugees in the shadow of the political uses of terror, and emerges with a vision of hell:

Now there’s a fire down below  
But it’s coming up here  
So leave everything you know  
Carry only what you fear  
On the road the sun is sinkin’ low  
There's bodies hangin’ in the trees  
This is what will be  
This is what will be

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**Bring Out Your Dead: Bruce Springsteen's Irish wake**

“They think they have purchased half of us and intimidated the other half... but the fools, the fools, the fools! – they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.”

Nearly 10 years ago, writing about Bruce Springsteen’s 9/11 album for a Dublin newspaper, I half-joked that despite the title of *The Rising*, there was “no mention of Pearse and Connolly”, leaders of the Rising of Easter 1916 here in Ireland. Now America’s 62-year-old bard of the working class has released a record that is not only steeped in Irish sounds, but that espouses insurrectionary politics underpinned ultimately by a sense that individual deaths can inspire, and be transcended by, collective liberation.

There’s still no mention of Pearse and Connolly on *Wrecking Ball*, but short of penning a rebel song based on Pearse’s 1915 oration at O’Donovan Rossa’s grave (quoted above), “the Boss” could hardly have made a more profound connection.
Which is not to say he has suddenly emerged as an Irish nationalist. Despite the “Irish”
accent he wheels out on “Death to My Hometown” and on the bonus track “American
Land”, Springsteen’s rebellion, like everything else he has done, is of course
fundamentally American. However, the message, like Springsteen’s fan base, is capable
of crossing continental boundaries, and when he tours Europe this summer his songs of
rage at bankers and fat-cats will be sung with as much gusto as in New Jersey. Perhaps
he has even noticed that we’ve got special reason to do so in Ireland.

Springsteen’s politics here could be based on Warren Buffett’s famous quip: “There's
class warfare all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're
winning.” Springsteen, a member of Buffett’s class, chooses to rally the resistance
forces, to air their grievances, to honour their martyrs, to point the way to their ultimate
victory – which might just be metaphysical.

Sure, Springsteen has made clear to those who raise an eyebrow at the side he's chosen
in the class war that he knows the difference between his art and his life. Asked recently
if he considered his protest role to be a “burden”, he replied with a laugh: “I'm terribly
burdened at night when I'm sleeping in my big house. It's killing me.” He added: “The
rock life is brutal, don’t let anyone tell you different.”

Still, we don’t dismiss Charles Dickens’ accounts of Victorian injustice because the
writer made a great living from them. The real question is why other artists who enjoy
the privileges and burdens of “the rock life” haven’t seen fit to address the crisis that has
overtaken Western economies and societies over the last five years. They must have
noticed it.

The only major stars, arguably, with the confidence and ambition to make an album as,
well, ballsy as Wrecking Ball are rappers such as Kanye West and Jay-Z, arguably the
most important pop artists of the last decade-plus. Springsteen’s opening line on the
new album, “I’ve been knocking on the door that holds the throne”, presumably refers to his frustrating, frustrated relationship with President Obama, but also evokes the rappers’ recent joint album, *Watch the Throne*.

As the title suggests, those rappers are not immune to questions of power, and parts of that album, like the brilliant Kanye album that preceded it, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, are openly and interestingly political. However, they are far more likely to rap – boastfully, critically, self-consciously – about the trappings of power than about the workings of power. And they are inflected with a politics that sees elevating greater numbers of African-Americans to “the top” as more relevant and achievable than trying to smash the socio-economic hierarchy.

West and Jay-Z also face, up-close, an obstacle that Springsteen can at least partly ignore: the taboo in much African-American public life against appearing to attack Obama.

Then there is that whole generation of hip young white artists who seem to suffer from some hormone deficiency that limits their capacity for full-throated rock ‘n’ roll rebellion. Fleet Foxes, for example, last year gave us an interesting musical reflection on the relationship between the individual and the collective:

> I was raised up believing I was somehow unique  
> Like a snowflake distinct among snowflakes, unique in each way you can see  
> And now after some thinking, I'd say I'd rather be  
> A functioning cog in some great machinery serving something beyond me

But the beautiful song that contains those words, and the album too, fail to sketch that machinery, and descend into mostly fruitless questioning that fully justifies the title ‘Helplessness Blues’. (Though we’ll withhold final judgment given the song’s promise, “I'll get back to you someday soon you will see.”) In name alone, could there be a starker contrast than between ‘Helplessness Blues’ and ‘Wrecking Ball’?
PJ Harvey, to her credit, seems to have a bit more fight in her voice. But her much-honoured album *Let England Shake*, which excited critics with its seeming Political Relevance, mostly seems to be angry about World World One.

Some of Springsteen’s fellow old guard have lashed out politically in recent years. Neil Young – who wrote the lovely seemingly non-political title track of Emmylou Harris’s 1995 alt-country album that was also called *Wrecking Ball* – has stepped back from the agitprop of 2006’s Bush-hating *Living With War* but still seems to care in his own manic way about what happens to the world.

One of the most sly and acerbic of political songwriters, Randy Newman, was in Dublin last week to remind us that you don’t need a wrecking ball to attack racism, imperialism and other forms of injustice. Newman’s own Bush-era album, *Harps and Angels*, contained a few political broadsides, along with the immortal lines, “The rich are getting richer/ I should know.”

Bush, as Counterpunchers know all too well, was a rather easier target than Obama. Newman shows no signs of trying to address more recent circumstances. Newman told a interviewer in February: “The last album was all about death. Where do I go from there?”

As it happens, *Wrecking Ball* is all about death too. But for the earnest Springsteen, “where I go from there” is toward a revolutionary resurrection.

anti-heroes of ‘Jungleland’ may “wind up wounded, and not even dead”, but the narrator of the new album’s ‘Easy Money’ knows the truth that runs through Springsteen’s work and explodes here: every one of us has “got me a date on the far shore”.

The fact that Bruce seems to have death on his mind is not surprising. E Street Band organist Danny Federici died in 2008, and saxophonist Clarence Clemons last year. Those deaths came after Springsteen had tempted fate in a 2007 interview by pointing proudly to his band’s 100 per cent survival rate.

When it came out as a single in January I wondered at first why ‘We Take Care of Our Own’ goes for minor-key irony in its chorus rather than the anger that it seems to promise in its opening bars. Then I thought of that old interview, and its “we take care of each other” message about his band, and started to hear the grief mixed in with the politics. In the song’s video, as Bruce sings “Wherever this flag’s flown/ We take care of our own”, we see “this flag” not as the US stars and stripes, but rather Springsteen’s own upraised hand and bowed head. The message, it seems, is about E Street as much as America, and it’s a bit questioning, maybe a bit guilty, and far from jingoistic.

If, for whatever reason, that opening track doesn’t go for the political jugular, this album delivers plenty of anger elsewhere. The original ‘My Hometown’, which closed 1984’s Born in the USA, was a quiet elegy for a dead place. In 2012’s revision, Springsteen brings “Death” to the song title but rebel-life to its sentiment. “Get yourself a song to sing,” the Irish-voiced narrator of ‘Death to My Hometown’ tells his “sonny boy”, but the “clack-clack” sound-effect of a shotgun in the mix suggests he’ll do more than sing to “send the robber barons straight to hell”. It’s not the only threat of violence on the album, but it’s among the most direct. It’s no wonder that in a mostly favourable CD review, “Death to My Hometown” was singled out for disapproval by the Irish
Times, proud local sponsor here in Ireland of EU-ECB-IMF-certified class warfare from above. (The usually perceptive Irish Times reviewer, Joe Breen, couldn’t even bring himself to mention that Springsteen’s call to arms sounds, well, Irish, at least in a Dexy Midnight Runners sort of way.)

In ‘Death...’ the narrator’s address to his son and the shotgun reference both refer to ‘My Hometown’, on an album that is otherwise refreshingly underivative of Old Bruce, though it tips its hat musically to plenty of other people, notably The Band, Curtis Mayfield, Johnny Cash, the Pogues and Arcade Fire. ‘Death to My Hometown’ samples, to stirring martial effect, an Alax Lomax 1959 recording of the Alabama Sacred Heart singers. There’s even a bit of rap, though thankfully Bruce doesn’t do it himself. Together with new producer Ron Aniello he has produced his most interesting-sounding yet coherent record in 30 years, and among his best ever.

The excellent analysis of the album by Peter Stone Brown here on Counterpunch in February perfectly captures the record’s flow and power, which along with its superior sound quality (mostly with non E Street musicians) take it beyond even his very good 21st-century works, The Rising, Devils & Dust and Magic, even while (apart from ‘This Depression’) it avoids the emotional depths they plumbed. This is in many ways the album that answers, in political and spiritual terms, the question posed by the oldie he made his own on the Seeger Sessions tour in 2006: ‘How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?’

Wrecking Ball veers away from traditional Springsteeniana in the unspecific songwriting. Unlike his previous folk-flavoured records – Nebraska, The Ghost of Tom Joad and Devils & Dust all teemed with characters and tales – there are no real stories here. There is no Mary on this album; indeed there are only four names in total: Jesus; Jack (in “Jack of All Trades”, not the Dublin rambler of the Irish folk song but an
Every working man, a Mexican immigrant if the mariachi horns that fuel this slow-burner along with Tom Morello’s guitar are anything to go by; plus gun-makers Smith and Wesson. This is an album of anthems rather than ballads, with all the subtlety of a “Smith & Wesson 38” or the titular wrecking ball. (The song ‘Wrecking Ball’, by the way, has been around for three years; ‘Land of Hope and Dreams’ for 10 years longer; some fans complained at first about getting old songs, but these two deadly death-defiers – “Bring on your wrecking ball!” – both find their perfect place on this album.)

Even the lust-song ‘You’ve Got It’ is head-clearingly direct, though it is not immune to being interpreted in terms of the narrator’s desire for, say, political passion and connection, not (just) sex.

The song that comes closest to specificity and subtlety is the stunning final one, ‘We Are Alive’; typically for this album, the “we are alive” chorus is notionally sung by dead people, political martyrs, including a striking worker from the 1870s, schoolgirls killed in a racist firebombing in the 1960s, an immigrant who didn’t make it across the desert. This is where Joe Hill meets Padraig Pearse, not to evoke pathos but to inspire resistance, as the spirits rise “To carry the fire and light the spark/ To fight shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart”.

It’s perhaps a far cry from the 2008 embrace of Obama. Like *Ghost of Tom Joad*, released in the midst of Clinton-love among most US liberals, *Wrecking Ball* marks the artist out as something very much other than a Democratic party hack. ‘Rocky Ground’, a beautiful song featuring one of the many fascinating rhythms on this record along with the aforementioned rap, uses scriptural language to address a shepherd. But unlike the traditional “rise up shepherd” Christmas carol that urges the shepherd to leave his flock and follow the star to Bethlehem, Springsteen (ever-more theologically minded over the last decade) urges his shepherd to “rise up” and take better care of those sheep. Several people have plausibly read this as addressed to Obama, especially when – in a rare
allusion to the anti-war politics that dominated Magic – Springsteen sings: “The blood on our hands will come back on us twice.”

Springsteen says he still supports the president but that he’ll stay away from the electoral arena this time. It hasn’t stopped the White House from issuing a video that excerpts “We Take Care of Our Own”; Springsteen’s response was to sing it on TV recently with a pointedly added word, “that”, to remove any ambiguity about whether he might be paying a compliment to Obama rather than offering a critique: “Where’s the promise from sea to shining sea/ THAT wherever this flag is flown.../ We take care of our own?”

But this record is not really about election-year point-scoring. It is much more than that. Perhaps Springsteen’s deadly wrecking ball, so passionately invited in the title track, is also, as in Neil Young’s punning song, a dance-party in the land of hope and dreams, where the lost and downhearted can meet and, finding each other, also find redemption. Meet me at the wrecking ball: God knows we could do with a party like that.
During what is generally regarded as the final great heave of Chartism in Britain, in the years leading up to the ‘last great mass platform agitation’ and petition to Parliament of April 1848, the movement’s dominant organ was a Leeds-based weekly newspaper, the *Northern Star*. Founded by public subscription in 1837—after new laws and taxes had effectively crushed the unstamped radical press — the *Northern Star* was not only the dominant voice of Britain’s radical-democratic movement (called by Engels ‘the first proletarian party’), it was, despite the high cover-price imposed by taxation and scant advertising, among the most popular of all British newspapers, with a circulation of up to 36,000 and an effective audience of many times that number.

It was not by chance that the newspaper shared a title with the short-lived Belfast-based paper of the United Irishmen, founded in 1792 and suppressed by the authorities in 1797. The Leeds paper had part of its lineage in the United men, and indeed the United press: its publisher, former Cork MP Feargus O’Connor, was not only an Irishman with a history in the Repeal movement, he was also nephew of Arthur O’Connor, editor of another United Irishmen newspaper, the Dublin-based *Press*, which ran for just six months in 1797-98. (In the 1840s, Arthur O’Connor’s 1798 book, *The State of Ireland*, was available by special offer to his nephew’s *Northern Star* readers.)

The *Northern Star* was in many respects a ‘movement’ newspaper rather than O’Connor’s personal outlet: he employed other men to edit the paper, and much of its material consisted of reports of events and announcements sent in by committed correspondents from far-flung corners of Chartist activity. No other series of documents
better reflects the wide range and popularity of that activity, and its integration into other aspects of readers’ lives: there were reviews of popular literature, an ‘Agriculture and Horticulture’ advice column, poetry both pastoral and industrial, and ample news from abroad – most of this eclectic mix delivered with a confident, often sardonic tone that was recognisably the mark of its publisher. And though there is no evidence of large circulation in Ireland (where Chartism was relatively weak and urban-based), between 1845 and 1848 the *Northern Star* reported and commented almost continuously on the Irish land question, the Irish Famine and Ireland’s struggle for independence, often in signed articles by O’Connor. By the end of this period there was reflected in its pages and elsewhere a clear if not always comfortable alliance in English cities (ever-more packed with Famine-era Irish immigrants) between the Chartist movement and militant Irish nationalism.

O’Connor had split with Daniel O’Connell in the 1830s and ‘the Liberator’ was opposed to Chartism’s radicalism, its ambivalence on physical force and its potential to distract from the campaign for Repeal of the Act of Union. The *Northern Star*, in turn, reported sympathetically on Repeal activities, but attacked O’Connell and other Irish MPs as ‘a set of lazy, idle, spouting gentlemen’, fundamentally corrupt and hopelessly compromised by their alliance with English Whigs. This stance had survived the prosecutions of 1843, after which O’Connor wrote:

> Although I have taken a bold stand against the prosecution of the Irish Repealers, and have justified and defended many acts of Mr O’Connell; yet I should consider myself unworthy of the situation I hold in public confidence, did I allow a passing circumstance to warp my judgment with respect to general policy. I tell you, then, that as a matter of course this, the Irish section, will be guided in their tactics by the prospect of patronage, and by that alone. Mark me, I know them. They are what they ever have been, and what they will ever be, *boastful in possession*, TYRANNICAL IN POWER! Of all sections of Whiggery, the most vicious, the most contemptible, the most servile, the most crouching, the most insolent and jobbing, is the Irish section.⁴
Worst of all, perhaps, the *Northern Star* accused O’Connell of being boring, his pronouncements a 19th-century equivalent of Hume-speak:

The repetition ad nauseum of Mr O’Connell’s wholesale stereotyped repeal speeches had, long previous to the State Prosecutions, the sedative effect of allaying that excitement which, while fresh and feverish, they had created in the mercurial minds of Irishmen.\(^5\)

It should be noted that, prior to 1845 at any rate, the *Northern Star* could be sectarian about any and all political activity that deviated ‘but a hair’s breadth’ from what O’Connor called ‘the straight and defined road of principle’ that led to ‘unsullied Chartism’.\(^6\)

In April 1845, however, O’Connor himself launched one such deviation, in the form of the Chartist Land Plan. Much of the discussion of Ireland, and especially of the Famine, in the *Northern Star* over subsequent years should be seen in the light of this extraordinary, ambitious scheme to raise money by subscription and purchase small farms for workers, thus liberating them from wage slavery. O’Connor saw the scheme as potentially liberating even for workers who didn’t take it up, by undermining the employers’ position: ‘I aim… to establish the standard of wages in the artificial market by the value of free labour in the natural market’ and ‘relieve the labour market of its surplus hands’.\(^7\) Although membership in what was initially called the Chartist ‘National Co-operative Land Society’ was essentially confined to England, there can be no doubt that the scheme was intimately linked in O’Connor’s mind with Ireland’s land question. Indeed, the *Northern Star* offered O’Connor’s own book, *On the Practical Management of Small Farms*, at a discount offer to readers who also purchased Uncle Arthur’s *State of Ireland*, which identified the power of landlords as the chief instrument of injustice in Ireland.

The Land Plan was never a great success, and rivals within and without the movement attacked it immediately. In May 1845 O’Connor used the *Northern Star* to address a
defensive letter to ‘The Trades of England’, opening with a joke about his Irish ‘word and a blow’ diplomacy: ‘You are dull as swine,’ he wrote, ‘on all matters that do not promise a fascinating result on the first Saturday night after you have experimentalised with them.’ One of the bitterest critics was a fellow Irishman, James Bronterre O’Brien (editor of a rival newspaper, the National Reformer), who opposed the Land Plan as a tactic and in principle, seeing peasant-proprietorship as a backward social structure. O’Connor continuously attacked ‘Jemmy O’Brien’ as an out-of-touch intellectual, saying pointedly that he did not know ‘in which class to place him, whether knave or fool’. O’Connor also doubted whether O’Brien could himself survive on as much as 30 acres of land. (The Land Plan envisaged self-sufficiency on about four acres.)

In autumn 1845 O’Connor sought to drum up support for the Land Plan by travelling to Belgium to report on the wonders of a small-farm economy there. In his account for the Northern Star, amidst praise for the Belgian parliament and crown he noted a potential crisis, though one he was sure would be successfully managed there: ‘the potato crop has failed in this country. More than a year’s crop has been lost… it will be impossible TO GET SEED FOR NEXT YEAR.’

Only a fortnight earlier O’Connor had written of the need for English workers to concern themselves with Irish matters:

How often have I told you, English working men, that the prosperity of the Irish labourers was a question as much affecting you as them; because the want of profitable occupation AT HOME, where there is an ample field for their labour, compels them to come as competitors into YOUR market.

Now, that reality of migration was about to get a vicious push-factor. For the first couple of weeks in October 1845, the Northern Star treated reports of the Irish potato blight as a passing opportunity to comment on the belated nature of English attention to the plight of Ireland, and what strong support the Irish situation suggested for the
principles of the Land Plan. But in the 18 October edition, the catastrophe was acknowledged:

So long as there was room to hope that statements were exaggerated, we forebore alluding to the subject… it is greatly to be feared that the calamity will be much worse felt than at first supposed.\textsuperscript{12}

The calamity continued, however to be an opportunity to promote the Land Plan. In November, without direct mention of Ireland, O’Connor assured readers that land-owning small-farmers didn’t starve because ‘few men put all their eggs in one basket’. For the hypothetical peasant proprietor,

his position as a free labourer will allow him to spread the calamity of one season over more extensive time, by enabling him to seek such credit as will make up for the deficiency.\textsuperscript{13}

Again without mentioning Ireland, he said the high quality of English soil would encourage diverse agriculture. For the first time since the launch of the plan eight months earlier, O’Connor was forced to spell out its advantages in contrast to the actual (disastrous) circumstances of (implied Irish) agricultural tenants and labourers, rather than to those of industrial workers. Having assured workers that land-ownership would mean they were no longer at the mercy of business cycles, here he attempted to promise it would not leave them at the mercy of nature. A year and a half later, when the first Chartist land settlement (‘O’Connorville’, of course) was launched, he wrote to its new occupants:

While plague, pestilence, and famine are depopulating my country… it is no small pride and consolation to me that I have rescued you from the monsters, and placed you in your castles, on your own domains.\textsuperscript{14}

It was not only in the pages of the \textit{Northern Star} that landlords and landlordism were blamed for Ireland’s travails. But the newspaper was, unusually, prepared to ascribe some revolutionary potential to the Irish situation in autumn 1845, as it editorialised:
When we contrast the paternal speech of the King of Belgium with the perfect listlessness and apathy of our rulers at home, we are irresistibly led to the conclusion to which Mr O’Connor had arrived in his first letter from that country, namely, that the Land belongs in the possession of the people…. And already are the landlords of Ireland are beginning to discover that such also must be the rational conclusion to which their serfs must come. The pompous and ostentatious offering of a pitiful portion of their enormous wealth that they have extracted from the sinews of their slaves, will be looked upon, not as the result of charity but as the result of fear.¹⁵

The newspaper continued: ‘We tell the Irish people that any man who wants to be a consumer must also be a producer upon his own account.’ There was also a dig at O’Connell and his like, for failing to show the prescience of O’Connor: ‘If the patriots had organized a Land Society…’¹⁶

This is not the place to track the gradual demise of the Chartist land initiatives over the subsequent six years, but not the least of the ironies of their relative failure is that, having purchased relatively poor land in some cases, the settlements were encouraged to rely on potato-based subsistence agriculture, and were affected by blight in the late 1840s.¹⁷ By that time O’Connor was again an MP (for Nottingham) and his favourite subject in the Commons was decidedly not the legal and financial chaos engulfing the Land Plan. It was Ireland.

The support of O’Connor and other Chartists for Irish causes appears to have been deeply felt and genuine. The Northern Star’s English-born editor in this period, George Julian Harney, had joined the Repeal Association in Sheffield back in 1843. Historian Dorothy Thompson credits the insights and sensitivities of the Chartist leadership, and the political alliances formed on the ground between Chartists and immigrant Irish nationalists, with helping to prevent widespread anti-Irish sentiment among the English working class until after 1848.¹⁸

The continuing disapproval of Chartism from most Irish political and church leaders would hardly have been a decisive factor in inhibiting this alliance-building.
Ribbonism, after all, was denounced in even stronger terms, but it retained a hold upon
the sympathies of many Irish people, emigrants very much included. A leading Repealer
claimed that ‘Manchester was, in point of fact, the focus of Ribbonism in Ireland’; Father Daniel Hearne wrote to O’Connell that ‘there were eight Ribbon lodges in
Manchester, and that they were very strong in Liverpool’.19

The Repeal Association itself was splintering in Britain during this period, as it was in
Ireland, with O’Connell’s leadership under pressure. The Nation, openly antagonistic to
O’Connell by this time, revelled in reporting in 1846 that an O’Connellite priest in
Scotland had felt compelled to harangue a crowd of new Famine immigrants, ‘poor
exiles’, to ‘guard against illegal societies and… obey Daniel O’Connell’.20 O’Connell
himself had warned that Irish people ‘would agitate with the Radicals of England if I did
not throw their exertions into another and better channel’.21

The final ‘Secession’ of the Young Ireland group from the O’Connell-led Repeal
movement and the formation of the Irish Confederation in 1846-47 appears to have had
a particularly great effect among the Irish in Britain. Certainly O’Connor and the
Northern Star offered encouragement in the form of repeated denunciation of Daniel
O’Connell and, after his death in May 1847, of his son John. It was also prepared to hint
that in its publisher there was a more worthy leader of the Irish national movement,
quoting a letter to Dublin from a London Irishman who had resigned from the Repeal
Association and longed for O’Connor’s ascent: ‘How many an Irish heart in this
metropolis would pant with joy to listen to him addressing a Young Ireland meeting.’22

The Northern Star’s coverage of the Irish split, starting in the summer of 1846, mocked
O’Connell without endorsing his Young Ireland rivals. Although O’Connor was himself
famously equivocal on the question of ‘physical force’, often claiming to be more a
‘moral force’ man, the newspaper’s editorial attacked O’Connell’s ‘attempt to renew the
bugaboo of physical force’ in his arguments with the Young Irelanders, who had opposed a motion condemning physical force as a matter of principle, and scrapped with O’Connell over an election nomination. The editorial continued:

We were not a little astonished at learning that the real meaning of physical force was to be found in three gentlemen coming down from the Nation office to oppose the return of a Government hack for the Repeal borough of Dungarvon [sic].

The Northern Star said O’Connell’s stance was hypocritical: it reminded readers of O’Connell ‘monster meetings’ for Repeal in 1843 – it is likely that many readers were immigrant veterans of those meetings – and of the physical threat implied by such huge gatherings. The ‘news’ account of the split, in the pages of the same edition, was headlined ‘Declaration of War Between the Great Humbug Dan and “Young Ireland’’, and the proceedings of the fateful Dublin Repeal meeting were edited to O’Connell’s detriment. Three weeks later, substantial space was given to a letter from Dublin-based Chartist Patrick O’Higgins, which took the form of an ‘Indictment’ of O’Connell, and editor Harney produced a bylined parody of the stormy Dublin proceedings.

Coverage of O’Connell in the months between the split and his death was more negative than ever. In January 1847 an editorial came close to blaming the Famine on O’Connell’s post-Emancipation policies:

This inclement season, and the dreary famine now raging through a fertile land overflowing with milk and honey, and peopled with a generous, industrious and frugal race, would tempt us to withhold a very critical review of Irish politics, but for the fact that all thought of social improvement for the last fifteen years has been extinguished by the political blaze.

(Uncoincidentally, O’Connor himself had left Ireland fifteen years earlier.) Later the same month O’Connor published what he said was the text of a ballad posted around the Irish capital:

O where, and O where is the Liberator fled?
He said he’d go to London to get the people Bread.
But O where, and O where has our Liberator fled?
With a tongue as sweet as honey,
He gets hold of all our money,
And leaves us without a penny to buy a bit of bread…
He has sold us to the Whigs,
The base and bloody prigs,
Who have run their brutal rigs,
Upon us poor Irish dupes.
Dublin, Sunday January 24, 1847.27

When O’Connell died in Italy in May 1847, the cheers of continental radicals presumably ringing in his ears until the end, Britain’s leading radical newspaper carried only a short vitriolic obituary, a litany of the Liberator’s alleged sins.28 (The Nation, meanwhile, published with black borders for a month and suggested modestly that its guiding lights might hope to be O’Connell’s successors.29) In June the Northern Star selected a letter from The Nation’s copious correspondence on O’Connell, from notorious nationalist Father Kenyon:

I account his death rather a gain than a loss to the country…. He was the vaunted leader of a system of policy at once so servile and despotic, so hollow and so corrupt, so barefacedly hypocritical and dreadfully demoralizing, that the very organs of the government to which it pandered laughed it to scorn.30

Despite their other differences with the late Liberator, the Irish Confederation leadership in Dublin continued to regard Chartism with suspicion and as an irrelevance to Ireland’s struggle. The Northern Star reacted angrily, with a front-page denunciation headlined ‘Young Ireland, A Chip of the Old Block’, penned by L.T. Clancy, a London Irishman and Chartist. Clancy said the Dublin Council of the Confederation was ignoring the pro-Charter wishes of English-based Confederates.31

But while Clancy’s article asserted that Young Ireland and O’Connellite ‘Old Ireland’ were now ‘equals’, the Northern Star did not, by and large, attack them with the same venom that it had poured upon the ‘Great Humbug Dan’. Certainly O’Connor himself did not do so; thus, when in November 1847 the paper’s unnamed Dublin correspondent
produced a sectarian diatribe against the literary revolutionaries of Young Ireland, it was conspicuous for its bitterness:

The leaders of the Confederation are universally hated… these people feed their fancies with the hope of rescuing ould Ireland from the Saxon…. people say they are the veriest cowards in existence.\textsuperscript{32}

O’Connor’s own rhetoric invariably included mockery, but in his bylined columns he was more likely to be regretful than bitter about Young Ireland’s excess of nationalism and deficit of class-consciousness: ‘Our quarrel with the \textit{Nation} poets is, that they have laboured madly… to lash their country into a fury against England.’\textsuperscript{33} England, he declared, should be seen as a realm of opportunity:

\begin{quote}
I assert, without fear of contradiction, that the English working classes and the Irish working classes in England are better and more consistent friends of Irish liberty than the Irish at home.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Perhaps inspired by \textit{The Nation}, his own assertions of friendship increasingly took doggerel form:

\begin{quote}
O, Erin, my country, I love thee from pride, 
But I love thee the more for thy sorrow, 
And many’s the bitter, salt tear I have cried, 
As I’ve cheerlessly thought on the morrow. 
F.O’C.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Famine-era immigrants in Britain would hardly have been the first (or last) to find the atmosphere for radical politics more conducive than at home. The political argument for alliance with Chartism – that the Charter’s sweeping democratic reforms could deliver change for Ireland that the limited franchise extension of 1832 had failed to achieve – may have been persuasive. More tangible was the reality of a mass working-class movement (with Irish leadership already in place) that was different from the relatively rarefied precincts of Young Ireland. In the pages of \textit{The Nation}, articles about the Irish in Britain tended to complain about the discrimination that kept them from achieving high office – scarcely a concern for the vast majority. Despite Young Ireland’s
indifference to the Charter, radical Irish politics in Britain rode on Chartist infrastructure: in London a branch of the Irish Confederation met in ‘the Charter Coffee-house’ in Westminster; various other halls and pubs were shared by Confederates and Chartists, and Irish-nationalists in London and Barnsley formed an explicitly Chartist splinter, the ‘Irish Democratic Confederation’.

The *Northern Star* elicited Irish support most obviously with copious and angry reporting of the Famine. While John O’Connell, in early 1847, was saying that ‘the landlords have behaved exceedingly well…. no man can find faults with [their] conduct… since this awful calamity came upon us’, the *Northern Star* was tearing into them with a series called ‘The Irish Banditti’, about ‘the Irish landlords… headed by their Parliamentary gang’. Editor Harney objected to the limp verb ‘died’ to describe what was happening to Irish people: ‘Died? MURDERED by the landlords of the West of Ireland.’ Another article broadened the critique and doubted the ‘famine’ was a natural phenomenon:

> Now it is a generally admitted fact, and history proves it, that famine, to be a visitation of God… all would necessarily feel its dire effects.  
> … the visitation has been sent by monsters in human shape, who by the laws and institutions they have made, doomed the people… to live on one sort of vegetable food.

If English readers felt alienated by the *Northern Star*’s focus on Ireland, there is no indication of it in the newspaper’s pages. As far as Harney was concerned, ‘Irishness’ was part of the paper’s appeal, and he explained as much to Frederick Engels when the latter privately questioned the quality of O’Connor’s leadership:

> … you say the ‘weekly summary’ [a section of the paper] affords you entertainment – fun…. The summary is prepared by O’Connor as you might have known by the Irish jokes and very Irish poetry continually introduced into the commentary.

Engels appears to have taken the point, writing some time later to Marx:
Read the article of O’Connor’s in the last number of the Star…. It is a masterpiece of the genial art of making insults. It is even better than Cobbett and recalls Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{44}

Despite this elevation to the top rank of English literature, O’Connor continued to make his arguments in distinctly Irish tones. Speaking to supporters in Nottingham as he ran for parliament in 1847, he devoted much of his long speech (lovingly reproduced in his newspaper) to the cause of Ireland.

From the day the Saxon first set his polluted foot upon Irish soil, what has Ireland had cause to be thankful for?...
There’s the history of Ireland – that it all ‘goes in rack-rints, and comes back in cold flints’, to shoot the producers, and kill all the poor. (Hear.)\textsuperscript{45}

\textit{Punch} had recently published ‘Grateful Paddy’, a few verses about the ingratitude of Ireland in the face of ample famine-relief from England. O’Connor shot back in Nottingham with ‘Grateful John Bull’, which opened:

\begin{quote}
Ogh! John Bull my darlint, you’re nothing but varmint, 
You’re playing on Paddy and running your rigs…
\end{quote}

And climaxed with:

\begin{quote}
So shout for Lord John, that’s not very strong, 
While we buys up the muskets, the powther and shot. 
And when we’ve the mains, you’ll attend to our claim 
For be prayers and petitions ther’ll nothing be got.
\end{quote}

All this was delivered, said the paper’s reporter, with ‘a brogue, an unction, and a liveliness so characteristic of true Irish drollery’.\textsuperscript{46} Even through the brogue the electors could scarcely have missed the ‘physical force’ sentiments. Throughout that summer of 1847 the \textit{Northern Star} carried various poems and ballads on Irish themes, with an emphasis on connecting those themes to the Charter and the Land Plan.

The Protestant-born O’Connor was prepared even to flatter the Catholic church. When, late in 1847, the Irish bishops called for a degree of tenant right, the \textit{Times} denounced
them for, as the *Northern Star* put it, teaching ‘that the right to life is… superior to the right of property’. The Chartist paper spent two issues denouncing the *Times* and the Church of England for *not* teaching that same principle. English Protestantism was also damned historically by O’Connor with some of his most flaming rhetoric:

A murdering, plundering, adulterous king changed the religion of this country to gratify his lust…. If the beast Harry had wanted to marry a Jew, you would have been all Jews.  

He counselled Protestants to show some humility rather than indulge in the anti-‘Popery’ rhetoric that simmered in the resistance to Irish immigration:

Let English Protestants have the manliness to confess, that when their ancestors abandoned their BELIEF FROM TERROR OF THE FAGGOT, that the ancestors of their Catholic brethren showed more true religion, as well as courage in adhering manfully to their faith.  

The martial tone of O’Connor’s rhetoric about issues relating to Ireland was scarcely an accident. The rising tide of insurrectionary sentiment had not escaped his attention, and John Mitchel’s break with the Irish Confederation caused particular interest in the *Northern Star*. In January 1848 the paper devoted half its front page to a bitter exchange of letters between Mitchel and Charles Gavan Duffy. O’Connor’s commentary left readers in no doubt about which side he took:

If [Mitchel’s] patriotism and devotion to truth should banish him from the land of his birth, as it has me, he will find a welcome home in the land of the brave and warm-hearted Saxon, as we have bridged the gulph which the ‘*Nation*’ would have made deeper between the patriotic of all nations.  

Perhaps O’Connor believed he could convince the likes of Mitchel that the Saxon’s warm heart compensated for his ‘polluted foot’. Interestingly, however, the paper’s Dublin correspondent treated the Mitchel split with the same anti-nationalist scorn he had earlier heaped on Young Ireland: ‘Won’t the Saxon tremble when he reflects on the “doings” in the Rotunda?’ The correspondent could still see only one man at the head of Irish insurrectionary activity:
Paddy always, and ever would, prefer an ‘able-bodied’ teacher or leader to ‘an atomy or Shinnawn, unable to take his own part, not to spake ov anybody else’s.’ The fact of Feargus O’Connor having ‘height, bulk, and muscle enough for a model of a Phoenician Hercules’, would, no doubt, work magic in his favour with an Irish ‘mob’…

Back in Britain, however, the *Northern Star* was taking considerable interest in Mitchel. Not only did O’Connor praise him, but the newspaper excitedly reported that many of the Confederate clubs in England were backing him: clubs in Barnsley and London voted sympathy and thanks to Mitchel; and the ‘Flood’ club in Leeds voted no longer to abide by decisions made in Dublin. ‘The course of action laid down by that gentleman [Mitchel]… will lead to large numbers of Confederates enrolling themselves as Chartists. Hurrah, then, for democracy!’

The growing links between Mitchel-minded Confederates and the Chartists are as obvious in the pages of Mitchel’s short-lived *United Irishman* as they are in those of the *Northern Star*. Each edition of Mitchel’s weekly paper contained several columns of Chartist news as well as its more infamous tips on the manufacture and use of simple weaponry. (Not for nothing did *Punch* call the paper ‘The Diabolical Instigator’.) The *United Irishman* loved Chartists when they were speaking as Ernest Jones did to a gathering at Holburn:

Mark how skilfully [sic] they do it: first they take the food from Ireland at the point of a bayonet. Well, the Irish naturally comes over to see what becomes of their food…. They produce a fresh competition reserve to bring down English wages, and they foment feelings of hatred between the two nations…. One faction has again raised the miserable cry of ‘No Popery!’ We answer them – ‘No humbug!’ (loud cheers)

Mitchel’s interest in Chartism was of course in large part tactical and instrumental: a Chartist uprising could provide the military diversion that would permit a successful Irish rebellion. Arguably his success in building links with a potentially revolutionary mass movement in England helped to persuade many Young Irelanders to follow his
insurrectionary route. As the Confederation reconciled around his programme, the British-based Confederates were to the fore: a three-man delegation from the Confederation to the successful French rebels of that year included one representative each from Dublin, Manchester and Liverpool.\(^56\)

And Ireland was now at the centre of the Chartist programme – to the extent that the small Chartist organisation in Dublin suspended operation to indicate its opposition to ‘faction’.\(^57\) On St Patrick’s Day, 1848, a big public meeting in Manchester’s Free Trade Hall brought together leading Chartists and leading Confederates from both sides of the water. Reports of the event in both the *United Irishman* and the *Northern Star* border on the euphoric. Young Irelander Thomas Meagher apologised to the crowd for his previous opposition to Chartism: ‘I do not disguise my true sentiments – I renounce my false ones (loud cheers.) The revolution of Paris has made me a democrat (loud and continued cheers.)’ At the same meeting, O’Connor’s soundbite was even simpler: ‘I thank God that I have lived to see this day.’\(^58\)

Needless to say, not everyone was happy with a combined, or diluted, platform. Dublin Chartist Patrick O’Higgins, while supporting the subordination of his local organisation to the Confederation, refused to attend the Manchester meeting because it was dominated by an Irish-nationalist demands – ‘cold, driftless, aimless, milk-and-water resolutions’ – and included no official resolution for universal male suffrage.\(^59\) Mitchel, on the other hand, expressed annoyance that on the Chartist side what was being prepared was an April petition to parliament rather than a rebellion.\(^60\) Mind you, the distinction wasn’t always terribly clear, as the *United Irishman* reported with some evident pleasure under the headline, ‘The Sword Drawn’. This was a report of Chartist George White’s ‘suggestions’ to the assembled working classes of Bradford for ‘forming an effective organisation’. White told the group to form 20-man sections:
He stated that the main object was to cause a practical and useful organization of both English and Irish working men to carry the Charter for England, and Repeal of the Union for Ireland. A number of men, both English and Irish, enrolled themselves as members.61

The fate of the Chartists’ ‘National Convention’, and the London mass procession on 10 April 1848, is not without ample parallels in more recent history. The establishment media hyped up the danger of violence, and the government threatened to use military force even against peaceful demonstrators. Then, when people gathered (peacefully) anyway, the establishment declared the numbers to be disappointingly small, and suggested that Chartism was dead as a movement. O’Connor of course resisted any such interpretation: he said the first evening-paper reports had estimated the crowd at 150,000, and only after the government had proclaimed the demonstration a failure did the next morning’s papers revise the estimates to between 25,000 and 50,000. Ever cautious, O’Connor said his own guess was ‘rather under than over 400,000’.62

What cannot be doubted is that the Chartist petition was a failure, making no impact on parliament, and that – according to accounts in The Nation, the United Irishman and the Northern Star – the greatest energy of 10 April came from the Irish contingent. The mass gathering in Kennington Common included an Irish corner, where there were addresses by Chartist and Confederate speakers,63 and the extraordinary account in the United Irishman tells how, inspired by a green flag with orange trim and a golden harp, the Irish literally rose from the streets of London to exercise their massed power:

Before they had marched a mile, those who, at starting, were within fifty yards of the flag, found themselves a half-mile from it. It would be impossible for me to describe the effect the flag had in the mind of every Irishman who caught a glimpse of it, and had a rebel’s heart…. Coming into Holburn, from Russell Square, there were a number of Irishmen laying down stones for the street, and as soon as the green flag hove in sight, pickaxes and shovels were hurled in the air, and from the very bottom of their hearts broke forth the Irish hurrah [from] those Irish exiles. All down Farringdon-Street and up to the ‘Elephant and Castle’, tears, blessings and prayers met, followed, and accompanied the ‘Irish flag’….
But should any person in England expect to find so great an assemblage of people together, unarmed, or upon the other side of the water, again, ‘I wish he may get it.’

The events of the day left Chartism in some disarray – a state underlined by the arrests in the following months of many Chartist leaders – and militant Irish nationalism in the political ascendancy. The *Northern Star* immediately began to look to Ireland, where a successful Confederation-led rebellion seemed likelier than passage of the People’s Charter in Britain – or at least so it appeared from the distance of Leeds. Faced with Chartism’s apparent crisis of relevance, the newspaper mocked the still-more-irrelevant ‘Old Ireland’ MPs, reporting with bemusement that in the House of Commons, ‘Mr Maurice O’Connell denied that the Irish Repealers had taken any part in the demonstration that had taken place on Kennington Common.’

Mitchel, of course, claimed his position against petitioning parliament had been thoroughly redeemed – even more so when the establishment press began to report in outrage that there were numerous false names on the Chartist petition.

> It appears that some poor fellow, in the gaiety of his heart, and not feeling that reverence for insolent peers and place-jobbing commoners that the constitution requires, dared to write at the foot of it the name of Pugnose.

Events were soon to wipe the gloat off Mitchel’s face, of course, as the Irish rebellion went more or less the same way as the People’s Charter. He, at least, went on to have a rather more interesting career than O’Connor, whose decline in mental health and political influence were as precipitate as the decline in circulation of the *Northern Star*, a once massively profitable paper which went out of business in 1851, two years after the defection of Harney in a political dispute with O’Connor, who disapproved of his explicit socialism. But the publisher and the paper had played a key role in building an alliance between English democrats and Irish nationalists that seemed, for a brief moment, to be rich with revolutionary possibility.
Notes

3 Northern Star 8 March 1845.
5 Ibid, 6 January 1844.
6 Ibid, 5 April 1845.
7 Ibid, 24 May 1845.
8 Ibid, 27 May 1847.
9 Ibid, 20 September 1845.
10 Ibid, 6 September 1845.
11 Ibid, 18 October 1845.
12 Ibid, 8 November 1845.
14 Ibid, 15 November 1845.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
19 Quoted in John Denvir, The Irish in Britain From the Earliest Times to the Fall and Death of Parnell (London, 1892), pp127-9.
20 The Nation, 4 July 1846.
22 Northern Star, 21 August 1847.
23 Ibid, 18 July 1846.
24 Ibid. Ironically, The Nation, 18 July 1846, had a fuller and fairer text.
25 Northern Star, 8 August 1846.
26 Ibid, 2 January 1847.
27 Ibid, 30 January 1847.
28 Ibid, 29 May 1847.
29 The Nation, 29 May 1847.
30 Northern Star, 12 June 1847.
31 Ibid, 3 July 1847.
32 Ibid, 13 November 1847.
33 Ibid, 1 January 1847.
34 Ibid, 18 December 1847.
35 Ibid, 1 January 1847.
36 Ibid, 9 October 1847.
37 Goodaway, p65.
39 The Nation, 16 January 1847.
40 Northern Star, 23 January 1847.
41 Ibid, 4 December 1847.
42 Ibid, 13 February 1847.
43 Harney to Engels, 30 March 1846, in Frank Gees Black and Renee Metivier Black (eds), The Harney Papers (Assen, 1969) p240.
45 Northern Star, 7 August 1847.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid, 6 and 13 November 1847.
48 Ibid, 8 May 1847.
49 Ibid, 26 June 1847.
50 Ibid, 15 January 1848.
51 Ibid, 12 February 1848.
52 Ibid, 26 February 1848.
53 Ibid, 19 February 1848.
54 *Punch* 14 (1848), p156.
55 *United Irishman*, 12 February 1848.
56 Ibid, 8 April 1848.
57 Ibid, 11 March 1848.
58 Ibid, 25 March 1848.
59 Ibid, 18 March 1848.
60 Ibid, 25 March 1848.
61 Ibid, 1 April 1848.
62 *Northern Star* 15 April 1848.
63 Goodaway, p69.
64 *United Irishman*, 15 April 1848.
65 *Northern Star*, 15 April 1848.
66 *United Irishman*, 29 April 1848.
a. ‘Tea and buns and everyone takes to the dance floor’ *Sunday Times* April 15, 2012
b. ‘Putting the Catholic Church in Its Place’ *CounterPunch* June 2, 2014

**a) Sunday Times, April 15, 2012**  
**Tea and buns and everyone takes to the dance floor**

Rossa Ó Snodaigh of folk-fusion rockers Kila is pouring mugs of strong tea. Jackie McKenna, one of Ireland’s leading public sculptors, is selling the last few buns, sweet confections topped with musical notes and rainbows. Donal O’Kelly, star of stage and screen, has changed out of his sweaty waistcoat and chats about local history and politics to family, friends and strangers. Novelist Dermot Healy is outside having a cigarette, keeping a wary eye on the weather. The floor of the Rainbow Ballroom of Romance is still bouncing with dancers, black and white, young and old.

And you’re tempted to say it’s just another typical night in north Leitrim.

The recent evening that I spent at the tiny crossroads that is Glenfarne, the site of the still-thriving ballroom immortalised 40 years ago in William Trevor’s short story, sounds like a Fáilte Ireland fantasy of rich, lively, diverse and accessible culture, steeped in tradition, in a beautiful rural setting. But these nationally and internationally acclaimed cultural figures were gathered together, largely under the radar of outside cognoscenti, for a work that is more tough, challenging and original than what we generally offer to tourists. More fun, too.

With its mobile production *Jimmy Gralton’s Dancehall*, Benbo Productions turns whatever space it inhabits into a 1930s dance venue – not much of a stretch in Glenfarne, where the “ballroom” was built in 1934. However, this is no ordinary dance.
The historic dancehall of the title was not in north Leitrim, but in the south of the county, back down the road in Effrinagh. And Jim Gralton (1886-1945) was the most unlikely of impresarios, a republican communist who had lived in the US, a source of radical ideas as well as foreign dances.

These unusual qualities, along with his refusal to put the parish priest in titular charge of his “Pearse-Connolly Hall”, put Gralton on a collision course with local graspers of ecclesiastical and political power. With the connivance of the church and the help of local IRA men, his hall was shot up, then burned down, in 1932; and in 1933 the Leitrim-born US citizen was deported as a “undesirable alien” by the Fianna Fáil government.

It’s a little-known story, if not quite an unknown one. Two-plus decades ago a motley crew of republican-socialists and local-history buffs used to run a terrific Gralton summer school in Leitrim. That tradition died out, but Gralton is still occasionally recalled by those picking through the traces of a radical left in rural Ireland after independence. Director Ken Loach and his frequent writing collaborator Paul Laverty are reliably reported to be considering a film of his story, which they see as a natural follow-up to their class-centred view of the independence struggle and civil war, The Wind that Shakes the Barley.

Written by O’Kelly – author of a long list of acclaimed one-man shows and plays – and directed by Sorcha Fox, Jimmy Gralton’s Dancehall forefronts its title character’s cultural struggle rather than the more overtly political one. In a play of few spoken words, it’s inevitable that the sight of O’Kelly’s boogy-woogying Gralton up-against the straight-backed, cassocked priest (Des Braiden) is what makes the show’s strongest impression. The slides projected at the back of the stage, showing various pious denunciations of lascivious dancing, also foreground this Church Versus Fun
dimension. One highlight is a great early-1930s quote from a Leitrim priest who wishes that GAA members would match their hostility to foreign games with equal hostility to foreign dances; sadly, he complains, the opposite is the case, with GAA men among the most devoted to the lusty African passions of the dance floor.

So far, so good, but there’s nothing terribly radical in 2012 about mocking and chiding the 20th-century Catholic church for its oppressive terror, even if the story of Ireland’s jazz rebellion can always do with more telling. *Jimmy Gralton’s Dancehall*, happily, does more than mock: it invites everyone to come and dance on the church’s grave. This grave-dance is, you suddenly realise as you’re pulled out on to the dance floor, a party that Ireland has been waiting for, especially now that the hollowness of the Celtic “we all partied” Tiger has been revealed. It’s one thing to condemn the Church for its failings and consign it to history, it’s another thing to celebrate the passing of its power and genuinely let everyone join in.

In *Jimmy Gralton’s Dancehall*, the idea of participation goes beyond “get dressed up in Thirties gear and run on to the dancefloor at the end”. The opportunity for people to get intimately involved is essential to the show, and is one big logistical reason why it has been performed on only three occasions thus far. The idea is that the “dancehall” rolls into your town some days before the performance and offers swing-dancing lessons – Paul Neary of Galway Swing, himself a fabulous member of the ensemble, does the teaching – so that when Gralton defies the clergy and keeps dancing, he is joined by a swarm of swinging local people. At the show’s debut in the Leitrim Sculpture Centre in Manorhamilton a couple of months back, the swarm threatened to overwhelm the spectacle, but it shrank to more manageable low-double-figures in Belmullet, Co Mayo, and at Glenfarne. (During lessons for Glenfarne a pair of local Irish-dancers turned up – one with some Gralton blood in her – and their stunning high-steps were duly integrated into the show.)
This enactment/simulation of local defiance is especially powerful and poignant in a place like the Rainbow Ballroom of Romance, whose own history was built on such defiance, albeit without quite the directness of Gralton’s challenge. Anita Gallagher’s fine 2001 book of local oral history with north-Leitrim women, *Rinso Days and Rainbow Nights*, is full of telling little details, about how you’d need a bishop’s permission to attend a dance across diocesan lines, or how girls would use a wet finger to rub the red ink off the front of the *Sacred Heart Messenger* magazine to get a bit of rouge for their cheeks before a night out at the Rainbow.

However, O’Kelly, Fox, O’Snodaigh, the other musicians and the visual-artists involved, Jackie McKenna and Édain O’Donnell, have put together more than a giddy tribute to a heroic local history of defiant dancing. They have forged an exemplary cross-media alliance uniting artists of various sorts, and channeling the cultural energy that is coursing through the seemingly sleepy valleys of north Leitrim. Manorhamilton, with its busy Glens Centre as well as the Sculpture Centre and energetic music scene, was a cultural capital even before the Celtic Tiger broke wind and sent would-be blow-ins across the northwest in search of affordable property. Today it remains the centre of a “scene” with many accents and producing a range of literary, theatrical, visual and musical work.

And it’s a scene that doesn’t do artistic detachment. *Jimmy Gralton’s Dancehall* takes to the floor with the help of some of those threatened with deportation today, the residents of the Globe House Sligo Asylum Seekers Centre. When Benbo took the show out of north Leitrim, it was to the far reaches of northwest Mayo to show solidarity with anti-Shell protesters – one of O’Donnell’s striking visuals shows Gralton, on the run, appearing on a protest beside Willie Corduff of the Rossport Five, both men carrying images of martyred Nigerian activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. In Glenfarne another image
showed Gralton protesting against fracking, the hot political topic in those precincts at the moment.

The ultimate message, then, goes well beyond doing a Charleston on the blackened sepulchre of Catholic authority in Ireland – fun and all as that is – to an insistence that Gralton’s story carries a still-relevant vision of a more inclusive, democratic, outward-looking Ireland. It’s no accident that *Jimmy Gralton’s Dancehall* comes with the financial support of the spirited global peace-and-justice organisation Afri (Action from Ireland) as well as the more typical Arts Council and Foras na Gaeilge backing. Afri is also supporting a series of political films at the Glens Centre, the Jimmy Gralton Film Club.

A few months ago, there was a brief, small Dublin kerfuffle, led by Fintan O’Toole, about the failure of Irish cultural institutions, and the national theatre in particular, to produce exciting work that engages with the present crisis in radical, imaginative ways. Then everyone shuffled back into position for more of the same old, same old.

Except in Leitrim, where it seems like radical and imaginative engagement comes with the territory. In Leitrim, they shuffled into position, then started to dance.

b) *CounterPunch* June 2, 2014

*Putting the Catholic Church in Its Place: Jimmy Gralton’s Ireland*

Ken Loach and Paul Laverty’s *Jimmy’s Hall* is as near as makes no difference to being a sequel to their superb 2006 film, *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*. The earlier film showed how the Irish independence struggle gave way to a brutal counter-revolution that preserved aspects of British colonialism and entrenched a reactionary Irish bourgeoisie to run the new state.
The great new film picks up ten years later and nearly 200 miles north of the Cork setting of *The Wind...* in the beautiful, boggy landscape of County Leitrim. The revolution that was crushed in 1922-23 attempts one last, jazzy kick in the arse of the new establishment, as an unapologetic republican-socialist returns from New York after a decade’s exile and re-opens a community hall that accepts no authority except that of the people who built it. And in Ireland in 1932, that means defying the Catholic Church.

The story of Jim Gralton and his hall is absolutely true, though director Loach and writer Laverty have taken plenty of liberties with it. Gralton, who had US citizenship, was deported back to New York from the country of his birth in 1933, ironically by a government that was supposed to be truer to the republican ideals of the Irish rebellion than the one that ruled the first decade after independence. Gralton was gone and nearly but not quite forgotten, with a few leftists and local-historians clinging through the decades to his ideas and to a story that knits together Marxist internationalism with Irish anti-imperial resistance; a love for Irish music and culture with the irresistible strains of American jazz. I can remember a quarter-century ago marching through the lanes of a Leitrim village with a few dozen of the assorted clingers, at a very lovely and thought-provoking event called the Jim Gralton Summer School.

Irish actor, playwright and activist Donal O’Kelly became the latest to draw a spark from the Gralton flame when in 2012 he produced a sort of multimedia, audience-participation pageant, directed by Sorcha Fox, called *Jimmy Gralton’s Dancehall*. (O’Kelly turns up in Loach’s film in a bit part; Fox is wonderful in a more substantial one.) The ‘play’ gets credited by Loach and Laverty, and so it duly turns up with a mention in many of the (mixed) reviews of the film. But I’m going to go out on a limb and guess that none of the international film-critic fraternity actually saw O’Kelly boogy-woogying as Jim Gralton in any of the handful of performances of *Jimmy
Gralton’s Dancehall that were staged, with the involvement of scores of local people, in remote locations in the west of Ireland.

I saw it in the old ‘Rainbow Ballroom of Romance’ in Glenfarne, County Leitrim, and wrote about it for the Irish edition of the Sunday Times. (My article is behind Rupert Murdoch’s paywall.) As in Loach’s film, Gralton’s stand-off with his parish priest, hater of both Gralton’s politics and his African-Americanised cultural baggage, was the dramatic centre of the affair; but the dancing, during and after the ‘play’, was the highlight of the show, great Irish highsteppers mixing with African asylum-seekers, and anyone else who showed up, to try some old and new steps, with the floor heaving beneath us. I wrote at the time:

… there’s nothing terribly radical in 2012 about mocking and chiding the 20th-century Catholic Church for its oppressive terror, even if the story of Ireland’s jazz rebellion canalways do with more telling. Jimmy Gralton’s Dancehall, happily, does more than mock: it invites everyone to come and dance on the church’s grave. This grave-dance is, you suddenly realise as you’re pulled out on to the dance floor, a party that Ireland has been waiting for, especially now that the hollowness of the Celtic “we all partied” Tiger has been revealed. It’s one thing to condemn the Church for its failings and consign it to history, it’s another thing to celebrate the passing of its power and genuinely let everyone join in.

O’Kelly and Fox used a range of visual and textual tricks, mostly involving slides projected on the back wall of the ballroom, to connect that celebration to various present-day struggles, including that of asylum-seekers fighting against deportation. (The results of the 2004 citizenship referendum, the tenth anniversary of which will be marked next week, mean that the strange spectacle of an Irish-born person being deported as an alien is no longer just a anomalous old footnote tied to Gralton’s name.)

Loach and Laverty, with their fundamental devotion to realism and verisimilitude, can’t quite play it that way. To be sure, they splendidly capture the joyous defiance of the dancefloor; and cinematographer Robbie Ryan uses Loach’s beloved, dying medium of 35mm film to infuse scenes with a watery Leitrim-light magic. But while playing the
story straight, they’ve got a political trick up their sleeves all right: instead of dancing on the Church’s grave, they breathe complex human life into their repressed and repressive clergymen, and remind us that there was (and is) more to reactionary Ireland than the power of the Catholic hierarchy.

It helps that they’ve got great actors to play the young and old priests of the parish: Andrew Scott and Jim Norton. For British and Irish audiences, the latter actor reveals a sort of in-joke that colours our understanding of the film-makers’ purpose. In an absurdly brilliant TV sitcom of the 1990s, *Father Ted*, produced in London but with Irish writing and acting talent, Norton played Bishop Len Brennan, an occasional character and a nasty, hypocritical piece of work who turned up to bully and discipline the eponymous Father Ted Crilly. In one of the series’ most memorable episodes, Ted, having lost a bet, was required to “kick Bishop Brennan up the arse”.

The joke of the episode (okay, one joke of the episode) is that the beleaguered Ted pursues the arse-kicking task methodically and without rancour, to the extent that when it is completed, the speechless bishop literally cannot believe it has happened. That didn’t stop the TV moment from being enjoyed and understood as a new Ireland’s symbolic revenge for centuries of repression and cruelty (including sexual violence, as the episode’s casual repetition of the phrase “up the arse” keeps insisting). There’s even, inevitably, an academic book called *Kicking Bishop Brennan Up the Arse*.

So when some of us see actor Jim Norton in clerical garb, part of our reaction is, “Oh yes, we kicked the Church up the arse. In 1998. And in regular repeats since then.” Whether Loach and Laverty intended the connection – and trust me, *Jimmy’s Hall* can be enjoyed without prior knowledge of Gralton, O’Kelly or *Father Ted* – they clearly grasp that the idea of the Church as the sole villain of the piece has been done, and it just doesn’t cut it, not in 1932, not in 2014.
In *Jimmy’s Hall*, Norton’s Father Sheridan calls Gralton’s attention to a painting on the wall of his study, John Lavery’s 1922 *The Blessing of the Colours*: it shows a patriotic Irish soldier kneeling, head bowed and flag in his grip, in front of a bishop: State subordinate to Church. This, says the priest, is as it should be. But as the film develops, it becomes clear that the relationship is not as simple as the old priest might wish, and that the Church is not Gralton’s only, or most dangerous, enemy. Gralton moves repeatedly into open conflict with the powerful when he challenges their class power, as when he and his followers restore an evicted tenant family to a rural estate that Irish ‘freedom’ hasn’t freed from its near-feudal lord. When the local big landowners and petty bourgeoisie confer with the priests about what should be done with Gralton, they address the clergy with a striking lack of respect; and by the end Father Sheridan appears to realise dimly that his culture-war with Gralton has been providing cover for an economic war being waged by local and national bosses and proto-fascists.

There is nothing trivial or academic about such an analysis today. For decades in Ireland, the liberal-left has been fighting the authority of the Church; even after (incomplete but culturally real) defeat of its power over the last two decades, Irish public life is dominated by retrospective revelations of the horrifying cruelty of the institutions through which bishops, priests and Catholic religious orders ran and ruined the lives of the disenfranchised: just last week we learned of a mass grave for babies at a home for unmarried mothers in County Galway. By refusing to paint the Church only in shades of black and blacker, Loach invites us to consider on whose behalf Mother Church crushed the lives, hopes and joys of generations of Ireland’s poor.

After all, the ruling class here has long since stripped off its ecclesiastical garb. The Taoiseach (prime minister), Enda Kenny, is a direct political descendent of the nationalist clerico-fascists so brilliantly captured by Loach, but he conspicuously made his mark early in his term with a stirring retrospective denunciation of the Church,
earning him a great rush of liberal kudos. Meanwhile, though, he has ruled with an iron fist on behalf of international bondholders in Ireland’s casino banks, and on behalf of the multinational companies that are happy to make a low-tax home in post-Catholic Ireland.

Love of Ireland lives in every frame of Jimmy’s Hall, in the scenery, in the chat, in the faces of Loach’s usual mix of professional and undiscovered actors. Barry Ward is magnetic as Gralton, Simone Kirby beautifully blue-eyed and careworn as his comrade and love-interest, Oonagh; and Francis Magee visibly channels Robert Mitchum in a key supporting role. It seems that Loach and Laverty love Ireland enough to know that (some electoral grounds for optimism aside) it still needs a Jim Gralton, or a few, not to fight the Church, but to fight the class that now rules without wrapping itself in Christian piety.
Chapter 3.4

extracts from Hammered by the Irish


An Irish Solution (chapter one)

In August 2002, the movement to oppose a US-led invasion of Iraq was beginning to take shape all around the world. And if you were sitting in an astonishingly large public meeting in Dublin on the 14th of that month, you could well believe that the Irish section of it might include a strong and well-supported dimension of militant, albeit non-violent, direct action.

The meeting, “War is Terror is War”, had come together after 81-year-old peace activist and Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan said he was planning a vacation in Ireland, one in a long line of such visits over many years, from his home in New York City. Berrigan and his Irish contacts expected a small, intimate gathering. But as the date approached it became clear that interest and excitement about his visit was a great deal higher than anyone might reasonably have expected, and it swelled to a fever after sympathetic interviews with him, conducted by telephone, appeared in the weekend newspapers – including the all-important bible of Dublin’s better-off liberals, the Irish Times. A meeting that was initially thought would fit cosily in the corner of a pub, and had then been scheduled for a function room in a city-centre hotel, was diverted by the main organising group, Action from Ireland (AfrI), to one of the largest venue in Dublin city centre, the cavernous O’Reilly Hall (named for its benefactor, Irish media mogul Tony O’Reilly). This modern hall is crammed into a corner of the Georgian complex at Belvedere College, the still-posh Jesuit-run high school in the still-impoverished north
inner city, the home-territory of Leopold Bloom’s fictitious rambles and James Joyce’s real childhood.

Close to 1,000 people can be accommodated in the hall’s steeply pitched seating, but even people who arrived early for the meeting’s scheduled 8pm start – starting times usually being treated as a vague fiction in the world of Irish political gatherings – found an enormous queue stretching down Great Denmark Street. It was quickly clear that they would not all fit even in the O’Reilly Hall. Hundreds of them were shunted into another room, where they could hear an audio feed of the meeting. Hundreds more abandoned the queue and headed off to the pictures or the pub. Incredibly, it seemed that something approaching 2,000 people had turned up on a Tuesday night in what is usually the very quietest time of the year, when the city is abandoned to tourists, to hear the thoughts of an octogenarian legend of American peacemaking. No 21st century anti-war activity of any sort in Ireland up to that time could have expected to attract that kind of number.

The message that the gathered crowd heard from Berrigan was simple and could be summed up by the meeting’s title: “War is Terror is War” reflected sensitivity about 9/11, then still a fresh wound, but also a rejection of the ‘War on Terror’ as a means of achieving justice. Berrigan warned of the military ambitions of the “arrogant and vengeful” Bush regime, and called on Ireland to respect its own tradition of military neutrality (born in the Second World War, when the country stayed out of an alliance with Britain, which had ceded only limited independence to part of the island in 1922) by refusing to co-operate with and facilitate the American war-plans for the Middle East. There was little new in Berrigan’s speech, but there was clearly excitement about hearing the words from his own lips, not least because he was bringing the message from New York City, scene of the crime. He spoke of some of the 9/11 relatives who had assembled as ‘Families for Peaceful Tomorrows’ (borrowing words from Martin
Luther King) to oppose the wars being fought and prepared in the names of their loved ones.

In fact, much of the excitement of Berrigan’s presentation was reliant on his ‘real presence’ in the room, because he spoke slowly and a little wanderingly, like the jet-lagged senior citizen he was. His fellow American at the table that sat at the front of the hall’s proscenium stage, Father John Dear, was a good deal more dynamic. Dear was an energetic, earnest and articulate priest with a lot of jail-time for anti-war activities behind him and, he seemed to suggest, the potential for more to come. He had been working directly as a counsellor with the bereaved 9/11 families and could speak straight from the streets of lower Manhattan about the way grief had been hijacked for ends that neither they nor other ordinary Americans really wanted to support.

There was, it was obvious from the warm reception they got and the questions that followed their talks, overwhelming support for Berrigan and Dear. There was, however, another dynamic present in the room, as hundreds of progressive-minded Irish people sat listening to moral instruction from priests, perhaps scarcely believing they were doing so. By the turn of the millennium, many people were seriously talking about Ireland as a ‘post-Catholic’ country – without being sure at all what comes after Catholicism. The 1990s, in particular, had seen not only the predictable declines in religious piety and practice among a population that was getting rather quickly more wealthy and educated – in fact, the decline probably started first and most precipitously in some of the country’s poorest communities – but also a succession of scandals that had decidedly knocked the Church off the pedestal it had occupied in the nation’s public life.

Already, only 10 years on, people spoke nostalgically of the first of those big stories, the 1992 ‘Bishop Casey scandal’. “Ah, do you remember when the clerical sex scandal
involved a consensual relationship with an adult woman?” The sensational story had seen the media-friendly and relatively left-leaning Bishop of Galway, Eamonn Casey, flee the country when the Irish Times revealed a 1970s love-affair with a young American, Annie Murphy – who had borne his child. Much more serious, everyone agreed, was the succession of horrible revelations that followed. Another camera-hungry member of the Irish Hierarchy, Bishop Brendan Comiskey of Ferns, was forced to resign in disgrace because of his cover-ups of some of the many, many, clerical abuse scandals that came to public attention in the 1990s.

While the media focussed on scandals, the disaffection of many liberal-minded Catholics had deeper roots. The conservative papal reign of John Paul II, who had halted any possible trend toward internal democracy and a loosening of strictures on personal sexuality, on clerical celibacy, on women priests, had further alienated many Catholics and ex-Catholics, in Ireland as elsewhere.

Of course, most of the Belvedere crowd could make the distinction between that corrupt and hypocritical Church and the principled and courageous one represented by the men in front of them. Berrigan had, after all, made his feelings about the US Hierarchy clear, after the American bishops backed the invasion of Afghanistan: “Maybe,” Berrigan said, “we should burn our copies of the gospels and process into our church sanctuaries holding aloft the Air Force Rule Book, with its command to kill our enemies, and incense that instead.” Nonetheless, Ireland’s Catholic-inflicted wounds still felt fresh, and were represented in the audience: one young man, in particular, kept questioning and then heckling the speakers on behalf of the victims of clerical abuse. Most of the audience didn’t feel it would be appropriate to shout him down, but tensions began to rise as the torrent of complaints rained down on to the speakers. The meeting’s chairperson, a superb and decidedly secular broadcaster, Roisin Boyd, seemed unsure how to handle the situation, which felt genuinely unprecedented. A burly, tattooed man
rose from his seat near the back of the hall and started down the aisle toward the heckler, rolling up his sleeves, muttering that he was going to take care of this.

Then the third speaker from the platform intervened, verbally rather than physically. An Australian layman, well over six feet tall, dreadlocked and t-shirted, appearing younger than his 42 years, Ciaron O’Reilly (no relation to the hall) looked down from the stage with a fixed stare and told the heckler compassionately but commandingly that the institutional church which had let him down was the same one that had rejected the Berrigan tradition of peacemaking, that everyone shared and sympathized with his concerns and hurt but that tonight it was important to move on and talk about the coming war on Iraq and how to oppose it. The heckler went quiet, the tension abated and the burly would-be bouncer returned to his seat. O’Reilly’s calm and calming intervention secured his status as the ‘star’ of this particular show.

He had already made a strong claim to this status with his riveting speech, full of passion and wisdom and self-deprecating humor about his part in anti-war actions in the US, Britain and his native Australia – and the prison spells in the first and last of those countries. And he was exciting the crowd with the imperative to act decisively and directly to oppose and prevent war and war preparations. Like the other two speakers, he spoke the language of the Catholic Worker tradition, founded in the 1930s in New York by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin to give comfort to the poor and oppose war. Unlike the other two speakers, he was not a brief visitor but seemed inclined to stay in Ireland, if the banner behind him was to be believed: “Dublin Catholic Worker,” it read. It had been made especially for this occasion, which was in some respects the group’s coming-out party, four months after O’Reilly’s arrival in the city.

It seemed extraordinary to think that in the nearly seven decades of the Catholic Worker’s existence, there had never been a ‘branch’ – members would call it a
community, or a house – in Ireland. Irish-Americans had long been involved in communities in the US – to the outsider it would appear the names Berrigan, Grady and Kelly loom largest in the movement’s post-Day history – and houses had appeared to some small extent elsewhere in the world. O’Reilly, however, had become the first one to try to put down Catholic Worker roots in the Old Sod of Ireland.

It was in some respects a natural homecoming for O’Reilly, holder of an Irish passport. His immigrant ancestry did not lie in the distant mists of the Irish Famine of the 1840s but in the less romanticized, still-painful mass emigration of the 1950s, when his father left County Offaly, in Ireland’s flat and boggy midlands, to settle in Brisbane, in Australia’s Queensland. The most sharply reactionary part of an often profoundly conservative country, Queensland was run like a police state right through Ciaron’s childhood and youth, with a police force that was heavily Irish-descended. Aboriginal people bore the brunt of the state’s repressive apparatus, but rebellious young people could also expect to be forced into confrontation with the authorities.

That, certainly, was Ciaron’s experience. From an early age the rebelliousness had a political dimension, with a commitment to peace and a sense of Australia’s part in the war-making apparatus of the US nuclear-armed imperium. (In 1998, after more than two decades of thinking global, Ciaron acted local in a decisive manner, joining with comrades to ‘disarm’ uranium-mining equipment in his home country, then serving two stints in prison as a result.) In the late 1970s, still a teenager, he read about the Catholic Worker tradition. When, in 1980, Daniel and Philip Berrigan and six others entered a General Electric nuclear-warhead facility in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, to hammer nosecones and introduce the modern activist tradition of ‘Plowshares’ (or in the Anglo-Irish-Australian spelling, Ploughshares), Ciaron O’Reilly was inspired. He founded a Catholic Worker community in Brisbane while attending college – he later qualified as
a teacher, a job he pursued only occasionally in subsequent years – and started a life of virtually total devotion to working with the poor and waging peace.

The totality was neither accidental nor incidental. As Daniel Berrigan puts it, in the movement’s most quoted quote: “Because we want peace with half a heart, half a life and will, the war making continues. Because the making of war is total – but the making of peace, by our cowardice, is partial.”

It was a devotion whose trajectory would take Ciaron O’Reilly around the world. For a time O’Reilly lived at the centre of the empire, in Washington DC and New York – working with homeless people and living in Catholic Worker communities, befriending the Berrigans who had been his inspiration. He stayed at Jonah House in Baltimore, where Phil Berrigan and his partner Liz McAllister lived and worked and planned, the spiritual community centre of the young Plowshares tradition. Of the four years in total that Ciaron lived in the United States, about a year-and-a-half was spent as a guest of the Federal government – Dan Berrigan was fond of calling it a “Federal scholarship” – in US penitentiaries. This prison-sentence occurred as a result of his first Plowshares action, on New Year’s Day 1991: along with a New Zealander and two Americans – they called themselves the Anzus Plowshares, based on the old wartime acronym for Australia, New Zealand and the US – he entered Griffiss Air Force base in upstate New York. While two of his comrades got to a B52 and used hammers to crack its fuselage, Ciaron and another colleague swung sledgehammers and knocked holes in the runway, forcing the halting of any flights taking place in the deployment to the Persian Gulf, where the US would unleash hell on Iraq just over two weeks later.

His prison stints took him even deeper into the American underclass than his work with homeless people – his white skin made him unusual in the US prison system, as in the Australian one – and made him all the more keenly aware of his privileges as an
educated white man, strengthening his activist resolve. He was deported from the US after his sentence, and back home in Australia he concentrated on solidarity work with East Timor, challenging the complicity of his government in Indonesian repression.

The same concern for East Timor was at the centre of his activism when he moved to Britain in the mid-1990s. There he did trial-support work for the ‘Seeds of Hope’ Ploughshares. He did similar ‘outside’ work in Preston for the Swedish ‘Bread Not Bombs’ Ploughshares in 1998-99 and for the Jubilee Ploughshares in 2000-01.

The ‘Seeds of Hope’ were especially significant. They were a group of women who damaged British Aerospace Hawk fighter-jets that were destined for Indonesia. Remarkably, especially for a veteran of the US Plowshares tradition like Ciaron O’Reilly, the ‘Seeds of Hope’ women were acquitted of criminal damage in Liverpool in July 1996 by a majority jury verdict. The jury, by 10 votes to two, defied the trial judge’s clear instruction that the defence justification for the action could not be deemed legitimate under the strict terms of the law. It was an enormous victory that indicated the potential of Ploughshares defendants to win over the ‘conscience of the community’ – as a jury is often called. It clearly indicated too that campaigners were winning the argument about East Timor, and it would be more difficult for Western governments to connive in its ongoing torture. East Timor’s independence was to follow in 1999.

O’Reilly founded a Catholic Worker community in Liverpool, and later discovered that the group of peace activists he was involved in was infiltrated by a spy – not from the notoriously spook-heavy British state but from British Aerospace, the weapons company that felt most threatened by campaigners’ pressure. It was one of many aspects of his experience in Britain that alerted him to the complexities and difficulties of working in communities and on prolonged campaigns. His work with Andrea Needham of the Seeds of Hope group, and then with Angie Zelter, who started the Trident
Ploughshares, also put him in a particularly strong position to observe how British activists had adapted Ploughshares activism in their own particular ways.

In one sense, once you get past the spelling there is no trans-Atlantic difference worth talking about. A Plowshares action is one in which activists determine to act directly against the machinery of war, doing damage that reflects the prophecies in the Old Testament books of Isaiah and Micah, in which it is suggested that swords will be beaten into ploughshares, indicating that war will be obsolete. Or as Isaiah (2:4) is recorded as saying: “nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.” It’s rich prophetic source material – not just the plowshares idea but the gospel cry “I ain’t gonna study war no more” finds its origins there. Invariably, of course, the prophecy-turned injunction takes on particular cultural and personal inflections.

For one thing, and crucially, in Britain and elsewhere in Europe (notably, in the 1990s, Sweden) Ploughshares did not have the powerful, almost synonymous connection with the Catholic Worker that it did in the US. On America’s east coast, where they were most common, Plowshares groups were often part of Catholic Worker communities. Those communities, among their many other activities, provided the basic infrastructure for Plowshares planning and support. Actions would be planned over months; potential ‘actors’ would go through a rigorous process of often-prayerful reflection and self-examination; they would be expected to have some more minor experience of arrest and jail before embarking on a path involving serious damage to Federal property and the felony conviction that was sure to follow.

American Plowshares activists, while much admired on the US Left, are on the fringe of a fringe of anti-war activity – i.e. they are a highly committed, hugely self-sacrificing
and mostly religious element of the small direct-action section of the wider movement. Even relatively low-risk civil disobedience (blockades, occupations etc) has seemed less prominent in the early 21st century than it was in the anti-nuclear, Latin-American-solidarity, anti-apartheid and anti-sweatshop movements of the 1980s and ’90s. Plowshares activity too peaked in the 1980s, with dozens of actions, many of them carried out by priests, nuns and other religious people, saw activists spend many years in American jails. (The median sentence was 18 months, but many were jailed for much, much longer.)

Drawing in part on the experience of Greenham Common, where women camped for years to oppose the presence of nuclear missiles in Britain, and probably influenced too by the highly publicized and anarchist-led environmental protests of the 1990s, the British tradition has evolved to become somewhat less secretive and insulated, rather more secular and Gandhi-an, than its US equivalent. For example, the Trident Ploughshares, named after the submarine-borne nuclear missiles they are dedicated to eradicating, are more or less permanently based near the Faslane Royal Navy base in Scotland. Rather than having ‘members’ who have been through the long rigors of preparation and then taken some particular action, the Trident group has ‘pledgers’ who are prepared to take action as required.

Perhaps equally significantly, the British Ploughshares in general also developed a more aggressive approach to legal strategy, setting out in court not merely to make a public point but to win cases by reference to international law and other useful instruments. In addition, US Plowshares campaigners keep careful count of the special actions that ‘qualify’ for the label, and name each of them according to some qualities of the ‘target’ or the people acting on it; the British for a time seemed ready to use the P-word wholesale.
In the end Britain’s Trident Ploughshares movement developed its own taxonomy of actions, dividing them into ‘minimum’ and ‘maximum disarmament’ categories. The minimum category, inevitably a longer list, includes trespass actions that don’t do direct damage to military equipment, and for which those arrested are unlikely to face significant jail time. (This distinction should not be seen as minimizing either the real potential risk to such activists nor the potential political benefits of a sustained campaign of this sort of action.)

Despite the quasi-liturgical trappings of some Catholic-Worker based actions, in which prayer figures prominently and activists’ blood often plays a part, neither the US nor the British traditions rely on any sectarian theological underpinning – the relevant prophetic quotes are from the Old Testament, holy to Christians and Jews, and there is also seen to be a clear basis for action in the provocative words and acts of Jesus himself. Nonetheless some campaigners look on the British tradition as a pragmatic, Protestant variant of Ploughshares, somewhat more middle-class in orientation, without the heavy Berrigan-esque emphasis on personal conscience and witness, and on the joys of jail. The British version takes actions and then expects to successfully justify them in court – the Americans, perhaps because they live in communities with a lot of contact with homeless people, tend to take a more jaded view of the law: they have been more likely to politicize their trials, get shouted at by the judge, and lose. These distinctions are of course simplistic: there is enormous cross-fertilisation, with, e.g., legal strategy becoming more important in the US movement. At any rate, it has become hard to generalize, when in fact full-fledged Plowsshares actions (in the American sense) have been few and far between in recent years. Nonetheless the differences are real and Ireland’s place between Britain and America is, as always, peculiar and complicated.

Ireland’s traditional Catholicism did not make it particularly fertile ground for the Catholic Worker tradition of action, nor for its underlying philosophy of liberation.
theology. The term ‘rebel priest’ was reserved in Ireland for those understood to harbor particularly strong nationalist sentiments, and even a tolerance for the paramilitary expression of those sentiments in the form of the IRA. There were plenty of them. Prominent ‘radical priests’, on the contrary, you could probably count on one hand, and the best of them – e.g. Father Peter McVerry – were known for their tireless assistance to and outspoken advocacy for particular oppressed groups, such as homeless youth, not for their left-wing approach to foreign affairs. The odd missionary priest might get some publicity on that front.

Indeed, a millennium after the Irish Church had harboured some of the most extraordinary and even flamboyant artistic expressions of Western Christianity, the Irish approach to Catholicism had long become one that eschewed enthusiasm of all kinds. The ‘well-liked priest’ was often the man who combined superficial out-of-Church friendliness with a capacity to mutter his way through a quick and painless Sunday mass. The bit in the Catholic liturgy when the congregation is invited to exchange a sign of peace with fellow parishioners, used in much of the global Church as an opportunity for embraces, is treated in Ireland as an unwanted occasion to catch your neighbour’s eye, murmur a greeting and share a barely-brushing handshake (you never know what you might catch). To an outsider, Irish Catholicism looks like it has entered some international competition to see which nation can best empty Christian rituals of any conceivable meaning, and it has won hands-down. (The last significant meaning left as of the 1980s, religious ritual as an expression of the Church’s social power, is now long gone.)

As for politics, it would be unfair to say the Irish Church has never expressed decent views on social justice and war. It is just that for many years those views were perceived as subordinate to its efforts to wield influence over people’s sexuality and the state’s role in regulating it. This had profound effects on how politics developed in the
wider society: the late-20th-century ‘Left’ in Ireland, such as it was, arguably came to define itself less in terms of its commitment to economic equity and social justice than in opposition to the clerical pronouncements that dominated the State’s positions on, e.g., contraception (liberalized only in the 1980s), divorce (introduced, with considerable restrictions, in the 1990s) and abortion (still illegal, with thousands of women traveling to Britain every year to avail of services there).

The most consistent efforts of lay people to instil liberation theology into Irish Catholic thought and practice have probably come from feminists who fought to resist the Church’s patriarchal power in the sexual sphere while maintaining some connection to Christian spirituality. It is therefore no accident that one of Daniel Berrigan’s best friends and correspondents in Ireland was feminist theologian Dr Mary Condren. In August 2002 Condren scheduled the Dublin launch of a new edition of her scholarly classic, *The Serpent and the Goddess*, so that Berrigan could be there to launch it with her, at the Winding Stair bookshop overlooking the River Liffey. Afterward she gave a party for Berrigan in the once-dowdy, now-swishy Clarence Hotel, owned by Irish rock band U2. Rumor had it that Bono himself had got wind that Berrigan was in town and instructed that a room be made available. If so, it was Bono’s only known contribution to the anti-war movement in Ireland.

Ireland had made a mark, however, on the global peace and justice movement with disproportionate and powerfully expressed solidarity with Palestine. In 2002 two activists stood out, both of them extraordinarily brave women, neither of them with heavy Catholic baggage. Caoimhe Butterfly was young, well-spoken, slightly punky looking with her dyed red hair, and for no reason other than that she couldn’t bear injustice had found herself in the Occupied Territories with other young Westerners standing up for the rights of Palestinians. Mary Kelly was a tough, serious, deliberate middle-aged country woman, a nurse, with a long history of left-wing and counter-
cultural activity that had taken her from communal life in west Cork to trouble-spots on various continents, from Colombia to Bethlehem.

Butterly had returned from the West Bank with a bullet-wound in her thigh, inflicted by an Israeli soldier in Jenin as she tried to protect children in the midst of a horrible military atrocity. Kelly had also risked her life in May of that year to bring supplies to the besieged Palestinians in the Church of the Nativity. Hugely credible women with a positive Irish media profile that was the envy of other activists, and would astonish peers in other countries, who are more accustomed to being ignored and demonized, they were nonetheless more often pictured than interviewed, and were rather isolated on the Irish Left. They certainly would not have drawn a crowd of hundreds, let alone thousands, to hear them speak in their home country.

In all these circumstances, it was not clear what combination of solidarity, piety, activism, romance and nostalgia brought so many people out to hear Daniel Berrigan in Dublin. However, what was clear when you thought about Ireland’s recent history was that Ciaron O’Reilly, speaking to more than 1,000 people (including his own father who was in Ireland visiting) was nonetheless trying to plant the Dublin Catholic Worker on uncertain and surprisingly inhospitable turf. Liberation theology, despite a flurry of enthusiasm for the Central American variety in the 1980s, had failed to take hold here. And for many leftists, ‘Catholic Worker’ was an oxymoron, like ‘Liberal Fascist’; or perhaps the name evoked some mid-20th-century front group, a Cold War relic used by the church to try to lure the proletariat away from atheistic communism. O’Reilly had a rap that summed up the Catholic Worker’s place in the world, or lack thereof: “We are often marginalized as too hip for the straights, too straight for the hips, too fluffy for the spikeys, too spikey for the fluffies, too Christian for the left and too left for the Christians.” That might just go double in Ireland.
O’Reilly’s own presence in Ireland was itself a result of conflict and contingency, less a mission that a refuge. The late 1990s had been divided for him between England (mainly Liverpool) and Australia, the latter including a large amount of time in jail. The new millennium found him in London, again helping to establish a presence for the Catholic Worker, but also joining the Simon Community, probably the most highly respected, and respectful, of the major organizations providing accommodation and services to homeless people in this part of the world. However, O’Reilly’s time there was less than happy: he got into conflict with colleagues when he became very concerned about the death of a man in a Simon hostel. Meanwhile, he was concerned about ongoing surveillance and potential harassment from the British security establishment. When a cousin of his went for a civil-service job and was subject to a routine clearance, Ciaron’s name was brought up by the interviewers.

Ciaron had met Dubliner Tom Hyland in course of Timorese solidarity work in the 1990s. Hyland, a bus driver from grey, working-class Ballyfermot in Dublin’s western suburbs, had become a national hero in the new state of East Timor for his passionate and tireless solidarity work. In 2002, he was invited to have that status underlined with a hero’s welcome from the new government, staffed by many of the exiles he had befriended over the years. Afraid of flying, Hyland was going to need to spend a long time away from home to travel over land and sea to Timor, and to enjoy the hospitality on offer there. Ciaron’s interest in coming to Ireland had met Hyland’s need for someone to care for his house and dogs while he was away, and the Dublin Catholic Worker was tentatively born when Ciaron arrived in Ballyfermot in April 2002. His old Australian friend and Liverpool Catholic Worker comrade Treena Lenthall was already in Dublin. A further small group of friends he gathered consisted mainly of ex-Catholics. If a Catholic Worker community didn’t instantly assemble, the house did
become something of a centre of activity: Mary Kelly herself stayed with him in Ballyfermot for a few weeks after her return from Palestine.

O’Reilly began to work, as was his custom, with homeless people. And he got quickly down to activist business too: the first Dublin Catholic Worker newsletter was ready for him to hand out at the anarchist May Day ‘Reclaim the Streets’ demonstration – an event that turned ugly and dispelled any lingering hopes that a diaspora observer such as O’Reilly might have clung to that the cops in Ireland were somehow more sympathetic or less potentially brutal than their American, British or Australian counterparts.

It was quickly apparent that despite the Republic of Ireland’s supposed neutrality, there was a significant anti-war agenda to be pursued in the country. Shannon Airport, a facility in County Clare that was a long-time refueling favorite for transatlantic traffic, had been used to move troops and equipment to Afghanistan, in an attack that saw little opposition in Ireland as elsewhere. It was clearly going to play an important part in the next, more controversial war.

A few months before coming to Ireland, Ciaron O’Reilly had his attention directed to Shannon when he got a funny email in England from a Dublin college student, peace activist, and highly useful technology boffin, Eoin Dubsky. Would trespass, Dubsky wondered, count as a Ploughshares action? O’Reilly, a veteran of two indubitable actions seven years and thousands of miles apart, as well as a friend of the all-important Berrigans and the author of two fine books about his experiences in the tradition, was happy to be regarded as capable of offering expert technical opinion on such a question, albeit perhaps with an Americanized slant. He entered into a friendly correspondence with Dubsky, counseling him firmly that, no, trespass was probably not sufficient.

Ploughshares, he said, generally involved a hammer.
“Very American” is rarely a compliment in Ireland, but it might have been on this day. Nuin, the American defendant, was the most frankly spiritual and perhaps the most obviously deliberate and deliberative in her testimony. The shrine, she said carefully, was “a prayer.” She admitted it was “a fairly intangible thing to say” but “that is what it was.” Her blue eyes opened wide as she recalled entering the hangar: “I initially paused for quite a while, because I was so shocked to actually see a US Navy war-plane here in Ireland. I literally could not believe my eyes, and I paused, and just stared, I had heard that there were war-planes here, and I knew this war in Iraq was to take place, but to actually see a plane with my own eyes was such a surprise that I literally couldn’t move.”

It was a far cry from Sergeant O’Connell’s tale of screaming invaders, and you could see the jury liked it. So why did she do this action?

“There were several reasons, four reasons actually. I would say the words responsibility, solidarity, urgency and prayer – and please if I could explain?” The whole courtroom willed her to explain. “Responsibility to me means literally the ability to respond: I’m not an Iraqi person standing under the threat of bombardment, I’m not an economic conscript in the US military, I am a person who had an ability to respond to what I saw was going to be the killing of innocent people, and so I had the ability to respond, I did respond. Secondly, solidarity: solidarity to me is ‘being with,’ it is a presence with people who are suffering in some way, and I saw the Iraqi people as very much suffering under psychological threat of potential full-on war; and I wanted to say to those people in Iraq, you are seen, you are heard, and you are not alone in this; so that is solidarity, it is ‘being with,’ even from a slight distance. Urgency: I had a sense that war
was imminent, that bombs were going to be crashing down on people in the very near future, and that people’s lives in Iraq were at risk, and action needed to be taken to protect the people and the land of Iraq. And prayer: I had a sense through prayer that I needed to participate in this particular action at Shannon.”

Sure, it was a well thought-out piece of speech-making, but it was a beautiful one too, and from this striking woman, a dark-haired mix of Irish and Native American, it blew like a breeze of truth through the courtroom. When Devally tried to probe her on why, if she was living in Scotland, she chose to come to Ireland to act, Nuin gave another answer, this time clearly unrehearsed, that had heads nodding and eyes filling up.

“Yes, it is a question I have thought a lot about. I was in the area at the time, and I have a great deal of respect for Ireland, I always have. I think a lot of Americans – I think especially Americans of Irish descent, and I am partly of Irish descent – we grew up with all sorts of notions about Ireland being – you know, rightly or wrongly – about Ireland being a peaceful country. I can remember having conversations with people in the States who were so proud of their Irish ancestry. I would ask: why are you so proud of a thing like an ancestry?... It is a country of peace, a neutral country, a country that stands up to people oppressing the innocent all over the world, and Irish people in solidarity with people in some of the poorest countries on earth for centuries.... This is just part of the myth, you could say, that Irish-Americans grew up with.... When I did visit here and I heard about Shannon, I could not believe what was going on. I knew, as a US citizen, that it was my own country’s government that was allowing these warplanes to go through your country, and there is a part of me that just felt very sorry for that…. I wanted to apologise to the people in this country for that happening. I will apologise right now, for my country using your country in such a way.” She looked at the jury. “I’m sorry, I’m truly sorry that is happening.”
Under Devally’s usual “this was just a protest” line of questioning, Nuin came up with an apparently spontaneous metaphor: “If you can imagine the people of Iraq, or a large group of civilians in Iraq, standing with a chain wrapped around them – let’s say the chain is rusty, and has barbed wire on it, and it is being pulled tighter and tighter until they are being crushed by this chain. And at Shannon Airport, because of my country’s use of that airport, is a signature link in this chain – and if that link can be broken, then the chain itself might fall apart, and then people would live.”

One good American deserves another, and the defence called Kathy Kelly. This call, of course, set off another long argument in the jury’s absence. In the course of it, Judge McDonagh made a comment that would have been entirely normal in the context of a political argument, but seemed strange from a judge in a criminal trial: “I have one problem with the language that has been used throughout this case and the slant that has been put throughout this case, that this was a war that was being perpetrated on the Iraqi people, without ever a mention from anybody of what had been perpetrated on the Iraqi people by their own leaders…. It is so one-sided, the approach to this, that I am actually concerned.”

Brendan Nix was concerned about the judge’s concern: “The prosecution is here to take care of their side, the defence is here to take care of ours. You’re the man in the middle and you have no concern except to show a fair trial, for the five people, not for the American Army or George W. Bush or Tony Blair. There are five people on trial here, they are your only concerns.”

McDonagh ruled that Kelly could testify, but only about what she said at Féile Bríde in 2003. “That is going to require an element of honour, which I think has pervaded this case,” he said. In the end, Kelly’s testimony was brief, to the point, and necessarily emotive, just as her talk in 2003 had been. For example, she said, “I told them that in
1998 I myself had gone into the obstetrics hospital… and all of the windows had been blown out by a bombing and I remember being with mothers in that obstetrics ward, so you could understand why people were in great fear.” She spoke of the photographs that had ended up in the shrine, and of what they said about the ongoing nature of the war against the Iraqi people.

Most extraordinarily, she was followed into the witness box by Denis Halliday without so much as a break, let alone a long legal argument. In a welter of further confusion about dates, he revealed to the surprise of most people, including the prosecution, that he had not in fact spoken in Kildare at the 2003 festival, but had been heard by the five at the February 1st rally at Shannon Airport. Halliday was also the star-turn in John Pilger’s Paying the Price documentary, which had been left at the shrine, and he got a chance to talk about his role in that. He was business-like, the alternative to Kelly’s more emotional tone. Were 5,000 Iraqi children a month really dying from sanctions?

“The figure varies. In the summer months when the climate is more benign the figures would often drop to two or three thousand per month. In the winter months, and Iraq does have a very severe winter, the death rate increased. Because children were dying of diarrhoea, dysentery, a cold would become bronchitis and pneumonia because they didn’t have drugs to stop it. It’s not sophisticated stuff, this is very simple.”

And that, finally, on the Thursday afternoon of the second week, was the end of evidence in the trial. Judge McDonagh appeared pleased: “Very good, well gentlemen, I take it you will need some time for speeches?”

Devally replied first. “There is an issue that will have to be ventilated before your lordship.”

“Ah.”
“Which I have signalled – ”

“How hopeful of me that we could move on.”

Everyone agreed it would be best to send the jury home for the weekend, because the court was going to first have to deal with the thorny question of the ‘lawful excuse’ defence. As Devally put it: “The purpose of the application that I bring now is to apply that your lordship deprive the jury of consideration of the defence; in other words, that it does not go to the jury.” He said he was going to use (mostly British) case law to show that while “the consideration of the honest belief is held to be a subjective test, but other features to the defence are objective, and not alone objective, but objective and capable and in fact necessary to be looked at by the judge. And it being a matter of law as to whether the facts of that particular case are as such to allow for the defence at all.” Matters of law, it seems, are for judges to determine; only matters of fact can be left to the jury to decide.

The legal debate that Friday was exhaustive and exhausting, trying the patience of even the growing band of amateur lawyers among the five’s support. The defence team seemed to do a good job of blowing holes in the state’s application, but it was hard to be sure. In pre-trial, Judge Mathews had agreed with the defence after a more truncated version of this argument; in the first trial Judge O’Donnell had appeared to plump for the prosecution after very little argument at all; Judge Carroll Moran had shot down the defence in both of Mary Kelly’s trials. What would Judge McDonagh do?

In the absence of the jury on Monday morning, soon after 10.30am, it was quickly apparent that he was unpersuaded by the defence case. While everyone in court accepted that the accused had acted with an honest belief – thus passing the so-called ‘subjective test’ – the ‘objective’ question of lawful excuse was essentially a matter of interpreting the law, and thus a question for the judge to decide, he said.
The key testimony on the question, he said, was Geoffrey Oxlee’s – and that had failed to establish that the action at Shannon had specifically protected any particular life or property. Moreover, the five had not done enough damage to avail of the defence: perhaps, one wondered, if they had roamed the airport wrecking all the US equipment they could find…

This was, essentially, Judge O’Donnell’s quasi-decision revisited, right down to the word “nebulous” – though McDonagh did not actually accuse the defendants of sitting down on the job. The connection between the action and the alleged protection was “too tenuous, nebulous and remote when viewed objectively,” the judge said. He was granting the state application that the defence be withheld from the jury. As a small mercy, the judge said he would not actually direct the jury to bring in a guilty verdict, he simply would not permit them to deliberate with the help of the ‘lawful excuse’ defence.

And, oh yes, the other defence that had been raised, that the action could be justified by the statute that permits the use of force to prevent a crime? That didn’t really apply either, on obscure technical grounds.

The defence team were, in the Irish terminology, gobsmacked. The three senior defence counsel were expected to make closing speeches today, and the judge’s comprehensive decision had thrown them back into the realm of emotional appeals rather than the legal argument they had planned. After a short recess, they shot back: let us bring Oxlee to the witness stand again so we can plug the gaps and make the connection less tenuous. (The defence had previously insisted that the statutory defence didn’t actually require definite specificity as to the life- and property-saving effect of the action.) The debate on this application, opposed by the prosecution, occasionally bordered on emotional. The judge said he would give his decision after the lunch break.
Meanwhile, however, from the time of the first recess after McDonagh’s decision, the defendants were hearing from their lawyers about a ‘nuclear option’ – an extraordinary phrase in the circumstances, but it neatly described the likely effect of the weapon they had found in their arsenal. O’Higgins rose just before the break and dropped a hint: “A matter has been brought to our attention this morning and there may be an issue arising afterwards which will affect the course of the trial. I am awaiting further instructions.”

“I await with bated breath,” the judge replied, with his usual charm.

Over lunchtime the defendants and their lawyers talked through their options. The team had, apparently in the last couple of days, acquired a piece of information, gossip really, that would almost certainly pull the plug on this trial. The judge’s decision had gone so comprehensively against them that there was scarcely any risk in ending this second trial and hoping for third time lucky. The decision was simple.

Ciaron and Damien’s senior counsel, Roderick O’Hanlon, stood up after lunch, in the jury’s absence, and explained: the defence understood that Judge McDonagh had attended George W. Bush’s inauguration in 2001 and had indeed been invited back to Washington for the repeat in 2005. If this were the case, O’Hanlon said, he might be asked to disqualify himself. Jaws hung slack around the courtroom.

“At this point,” the Indymedia reporter eloquently put it, “Judge McDonagh laughed aloud, and alone.”

O’Higgins proceeded to put a question the judge. According to the details given to the defence, McDonagh, back in his days as a barrister, had attended an event in Houston, Texas, in the mid-1990s and been photographed with then-governor Bush. He had attended the 2001 presidential inauguration and been invited back earlier this year by House of Representatives majority leader Tom DeLay. He had been unable to attend
this year because of a schedule conflict. McDonagh confirmed that the information was basically correct, though he also said it was “half right.”

The judge was evidently unamused, and said his personal life was not a matter for this court. But he was cornered, and the defence team drove home their advantage with a polite but firm application that he discharge the jury, not because he had shown any bias – God no! – but because of the potential for a ‘perception of bias’ arising from his connection to a man whose character and military policy loomed over this whole case. Any juror with such a connection to Bush would surely be disqualified, they said.

McDonagh called a short recess and asked the lawyers to meet him in his chambers. The barristers instead hung around the courtroom, Nix nipping out for a puff on his pipe, while the judge stewed alone. Just after 3pm Judge McDonagh was back, looking flushed with anger. He called in the jury and told them that the trial was over. He gave them no explanation, adjourned the case and flew from the room. He hadn’t even remembered to bar media reporting of the reason for the trial collapse, and reporters ran out to write the embarrassing stories. But the defence had done him a favour: if his connection to Bush had been revealed in an appeal to a higher court against an eventual conviction, it would have surely have been more damaging.

It was Monday, November 7th, 2005, nearly three years since the action at Shannon. Twice in eight months the Pitstop Ploughshares had seen trials collapse because a judge had permitted a ‘perception of bias’ against them to enter the courtroom. Even Devalley was turning up his eyes in despair and sympathy when he encountered the defendants. Supporters raised their voices for the charges to be dropped. What would it take for the Shannon Five to get a fair hearing?

1

You can’t take your eyes off Susan Fox. A slight, bespectacled, middle-aged woman in blue jeans and a white sweatshirt with ‘Zoo York’ in fancy script running down it sideways, she has been the object of shy glances since she walked, with a slight limp, into Shamrock’s Bar.

It is not (only) the history of stress and ill health written on Susan’s face that keeps drawing us back to it, as she sits with her sisters and brother enjoying a night of Irish music on a damp mid-January evening. It’s her resemblance to the younger of her two children, the face on the poster, the reason we are here, Chelsea Manning.

We have been told that Susan is somewhat delicate, socially awkward. But there is little sign of it tonight in this plainest of plain pubs, next to the Town Hall in the small port of Fishguard in southwest Wales. She drinks very little and chats with family and friends, including some new ones.

I hear she is shy of journalists, with good reason, so I don’t approach her, except to pause momentarily in front of her chair and mouth “thank you” when I’ve finished making a short between-song speech.

Maybe she likes my speech, which calls for journalists who, like me, have written stories based on Manning’s revelations to campaign for their source’s freedom: as she is leaving the session an hour or two later she takes it upon herself to come kiss me
goodnight. She speaks one or two emphatic syllables, but the noise of the place, my bad ear and her Welsh accent mean I don’t understand them.

Joe Staples, the husband of Susan’s sister Sharon, doesn’t seem to mind that I’m a journalist. He will be off with Sharon to the United States in a few weeks to visit the relative he still calls Bradley – he says Chelsea has given the family a dispensation to stick with what they know for the time being – and Joe is offering to ask a question on my behalf. My mind goes blank at the possibility of such a scoop, but he assures me I can get in touch by email when I’ve thought of something.

Meanwhile Joe regales me with frank, humorously affectionate stories of the strong-willed, challenging child who lived among them here in Pembrokeshire for several difficult years as a young teenager, and of the movies and TV shows Chelsea is most attached to in Fort Leavenworth. I silently decide with regret that none of these details, from a guy talking to another guy over a pint, are on-the-record for publication.

A baker’s dozen of us have arrived on the boat from Ireland over the course of this Friday. A couple of activist friends have made their way from British locations. One of them is Ciaron O’Reilly, an Irish-Australian who has been imprisoned in several jurisdictions but acquitted in Ireland for his part in damaging a US navy plane at Shannon Airport. These days Ciaron lives in London mostly doing solidarity for Julian Assange, who is still effectively a prisoner in the Ecuadorian embassy.

Ciaron decided last year to swallow his self-consciousness about his conspicuous, dreadlocked persona as a radical Catholic Worker activist and introduce himself to the patently unradical, unactivist (unCatholic) relatives of the Wikileaks whistleblower. That decision, along with the remarkable, dedicated activism of Genny Bove, our Welsh contact point, is the catalyst that has brought about this event, the first Manning Truthfest, a weekend series of performances and discussions.
Tonight we’ve settled into Fishguard, a ferry port and proverbially a place for just-passing-through, to sing and play and speak and raise a few pounds to help the family travel to the US. Susan has stitched a stunning wall-hanging of a tiger in the jungle as a raffle prize.

It’s the very first time there has been any public event of this nature involving the family here in their home region, where Susan grew up, met Brian Manning (stationed locally with the US navy), had her first child Casey and returned from Oklahoma with Bradley after her marriage broke up. It’s only six weeks since Susan’s sister Sharon made the first public speech of her life, on a visit to Dublin organised by Ciaron, Genny and the Irish global-justice group Afri (Action from Ireland), and less time than that since she talked about her connection with Chelsea for the first time to her friends at her regular bingo night. (Susan still refrains from public speaking.)

Tonight the family are surrounded by dozens of local friends and even in austerity-hit south Wales the fundraising bucket is filling up. By 11pm the stunning collective chords of Welsh choral music, led by a bearded security guard, are filling the bar and the Irish songs scarcely stand a chance in the harmonic din. It’s more than any of us could have hoped for.

The Manning Truthfest is the brainchild of playwright and actor Donal O’Kelly. He was so moved by the visit to Ireland in late November by Susan, Sharon and their siblings Mary and Kevin, that within a few days he had put together a plan to lead a group of musicians, performers and activists across the Irish Sea to support the family on their home turf – and to celebrate the courage of Chelsea Manning.

Donal thought that by following the migration route taken by Chelsea’s maternal grandfather, Dubliner Billy Fox, in 1948, we could encourage support for Susan and the other family members among their own neighbours, while underlining the Irish
connection and establishing a core of Irish people committed to solidarity with Chelsea and some of the people closest to her.

Donal, and Joe Murray of Afri, which is funding this trip, understand that such solidarity is not an abstract principle: it’s an active practice. To that end they’ve included in our travelling party the small bundle of energy that is Nuala Kelly, who for years led the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas, helping families to help prisoners, including the likes of the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four, innocent Irish people tortured and framed by British cops for IRA crimes.

Kelly knows the importance of prisoners’ families both for prisoners themselves and for campaigns for their release; and she also knows how to help families participate without exploiting or instrumentalising them.

Ciaron O’Reilly too knows something about how those outside can help those inside. “The system wants to bury you, to make you feel you’re alone,” he says. When O’Reilly was locked up in a county jail in Texas in the early 1990s for his part in the disarming of a B-52 that would have bombed Iraq, his broad six-foot-three frame wasn’t sufficient to stop guards and fellow inmates from bullying the peace activist.

But then the bags of supportive letters started to arrive and the bullies backed off. “The letters got me in with the Mexican stamp collectors and I built my alliances from there,” he jokes.

To date, active support for Manning in Britain and Ireland has been, strangely, almost invisible. Forget about her Irish grandad for the moment and think of the fact that Wales is where Bradley lived when the war started! Even activists who are happy to use her name freely on social media have failed to highlight Manning’s local background. A few journalists have come calling, to be sure, but nearly four years after Manning’s
arrest in Iraq. Genny, Ciaron and now the Truthfest contingent are the first activists to come here, chat to Susan, and meet with aunties and striking blonde cousins who uncannily resemble Chelsea and vividly remember the unique teenager.

South Wales is a beautiful region that was devastated by Margaret Thatcher’s destruction of the coal industry in the 1980s. The peninsular county of Pembrokeshire is a place apart, its 120,000 people struggling to cling to livelihoods in a rolling windswept landscape. Sharon and her husband Joe make their living in jobs related to the tourism industry, Sharon in a house-cleaning company and Joe designing kitchens long after any building boom has left the county.

We Irish visitors have been set down for the weekend, with Sharon’s help, in a comfortable set of well appointed vacation ‘cottages’ that have rather despoiled the tiny seaside village of Broad Haven near Haverfordwest. From the back of one, we can see a little nature reserve, so on the sunny Saturday morning I set out to explore it. It’s a pond and reed bed, and though the sign at the entrance says the wooden ‘boardwalk’ through it has been closed for safety reasons, someone has made short work of the council’s barricade, tossing it into the bushes.

So in I go. Sparrows peep, a moorhen glides across the water, and the signs explain that this “Slash Pond” is the site of an abandoned open pit where culm, a type of coal more useful as pigment than for burning, was mined in the 19th century. First nature, and then ‘Nature’ as a mode of tourism infrastructure, reclaimed the space, though now the latter can’t be sustained well enough to be pronounced safe by the cash-strapped local authority.
The coastal walk down by the lovely seafront is in better shape, though climbing the cliff head reveals what is otherwise hidden by the hills behind the village: an enormous series of skyscraping gas refineries, processing materials that come in at the docks near here from Nigeria and beyond. Four workers were killed in an explosion at a Chevron plant in 2011, and locals talk darkly of ill health among residents near the plants. This gives me a new context to understand the insistence of a couple of signs in the nature reserve, which explain that the lichens growing there signify the purity of the air in the vicinity.

Chelsea Manning’s uncle Kevin has cancer in four parts of his body, but as everyone says, “you wouldn’t know it now, would ya?” He is an inveterate smiler, and he has taken charge of much of the organising of our Irish group’s visit to Wales. Like the rest of the family, he appears to be growing accustomed to the political verities and pieties we visitors are prone to spout on demand, and with several other Foxes he sits tolerantly through the speaking part of the Saturday-afternoon session in a community centre in Haverfordwest, the market town of Pembrokeshire and the family’s home place.

This afternoon gig is the one event of the planned three we’ve been most unsure of beforehand – who will want to come out to hear a bunch of foreigners, myself included, talk about a local child who has grown up into a global figure? And the rare sunny weather doesn’t boost our confidence. Thankfully, the family, including Susan, turn out again in good numbers, and another 20 or more people, mostly of an activist-looking ilk, turn up for a lively session.

Irish writer, actor and singer Sorcha Fox opens it by reading Chelsea’s great Thanksgiving letter from prison, the one that praised MLK and Malcolm X, followed by an evocative flute solo from Ellen Cranitch. Then there are 70 or so minutes of talking, including, once intrepid techie Andy Cummins has fixed the sound, a video from the
great English lawyer Gareth Peirce. Finally there is more music, beautifully performed, in a setting that lacks the chaos of the Shamrock the night before – that gig, a musician said, “was as loose as a bag of marshmallows”.

Our accordion player, Robbie Sinnott, is a garrulous come-all-ye singer, a blind man who smiles even more than Kevin Fox and is almost as loved by Kevin’s sisters. Robbie accompanies ageless Joe Black, in his trademark black bowler hat, on a couple of Joe’s own compositions; then Imogen Gunner, surprisingly risen from her sick bed, strolls up mid-song to accompany them beautifully on fiddle. Young RoJ Whelan sings his own sweet tribute song, ‘I Am Bradley Manning’, and does, with Robbie’s help, as devastating a version of Dylan’s ‘Masters of War’ as I’ve ever heard from anyone, Dylan included. I’ve never heard Dylan do it in Chelsea Manning’s home town, in the presence of her mother, to be fair.

“You can’t beat an old Irish music session, boy,” says Chelsea’s aunt Joan, and she’s dead right. The musical gang, lifted by the quality of their playing in the quiet Saturday-afternoon session, have been conferring to ensure they reach something like the same standard in the more challenging environs of a Saturday-night hooley in the Labour Club in Haverfordwest, for their third and final set of performances here. As a mere speaker, my work is done – apart from lugging the occasional accordion – and this night is in the hands of people who know how to throw a party.

My shyness with Susan has subsided, and she tells me she was up at 5.45am to start cooking chicken drumsticks. I think guiltily of how virtuous I felt taking a late-morning walk along the seashore.
Between the endless supplies of food from the family and the endless supply of music from the visitors, plus a club jammed full of affectionate friends and neighbours, this party has what it takes. None of us pushes the political issues very hard here, nor do we think to get offended when the Foxes break out the leprechaun costumes and other Paddy’s Day paraphernalia to complete the Irish theme for the evening. Kevin’s red beard suits him and he’s got his shiny green collar turned up like an Elvis of the little people.

When my new ‘Kiss Me I’m Irish’ tie finally succeeds in getting me a smooch – after a barter in which I must agree to part with the tie after the kiss – my new friend tries to grasp what precisely a non-musician like me is doing here from Ireland. “So, you’re here to talk about Kevin’s nephew, right?”

No one here rejects Chelsea’s gender identity, but it’s hard to break the habit of a lifetime. Susan tells me proud, funny stories of Bradley’s successes in school quizzes and science fairs and even basketball games back in the US. We go silent, though, when percussionist Brian Fleming is performing. Susan was transfixed on Friday by his solo piece, ‘The Day the Apaches Rode Into Vietnam’, a virtuoso display of the incredible range of sounds that can be coaxed and beaten out of a bodhrán, the traditional Irish drum.

Tonight Brian is also performing part of his one-man show, ‘Have Yis No Homes To Go To?’, the funny, true story of a trip to Rwanda with Clowns Without Borders. The audience laps it up – it helps that he juggles, balances a feather on his nose and takes off his trousers – and when he is done Susan, like the rest of us, is agog at the range of Brian’s talents. And his Muppets underwear.

Haverfordwest is not short of its own remarkable characters. We meet ‘Brandnew’, a Scot proudly wearing the jersey of his beloved Glasgow Celtic Football Club. His real
name escapes us, because everyone (including himself) calls him by the moniker he picked up when presenting a gift to Kevin in the depths of the latter’s illnesses: “Brand new,” he boasted as he handed Kevin a sweater, and a name was born.

Then there’s ‘Dai the Rat’, a skinny five-foot-nothing septuagenarian who shuffles through the crowd in a white woolly hat: he is, the locals assure us, a successful male stripper. Aunt Joan can lift him by the shoulders in the middle of an Irish set-dancing extravaganza coached by the multi-talented Brian.

Ciaron O’Reilly, former political prisoner, and Susan Fox, mother of Chelsea Manning, are dance partners, swinging around the floor in defiance of everything, including the tricky knees from which they both suffer. “You’ve got to have fun, haven’t you, boy?” says Joan. “You’ll be dead long enough.”

Well, indeed. But Andy Storey, chair of Afri, has earlier quoted Shelley’s sonnet, ‘Ozymandias’, and its reminder that it is the most arrogantly powerful who truly vanish in death, whose glories are wiped from the earth by the sands of time. (Alexander Cockburn’s brilliant final book, A Colossal Wreck, takes its name from that poem.) The values of truth and justice represented by Chelsea Manning are the things that last, like the values of warmth and hospitality represented by her family. When we have a better world, Chelsea Manning will be one of its enduring heroes.

Her family in Wales have read some of the documents she leaked and seen the famous ‘Collateral Murder’ video: they understand why Manning did what she did. Still, they don’t necessarily share our version, or hers, of what a better world might look like. Chelsea’s uncle-by-marriage Joe, making one of the few speeches of the Saturday-night hooley, refers obliquely to “whatever our political differences”. We hear some family members may vote Tory – the MP hereabouts is a Conservative these days.
Those are not the politics of the whole family; we are partying in the Labour Club, where Kevin is active and the women attend the Wednesday-evening bingo. But we certainly don’t find it discouraging. On the contrary, this is familiar boundary-crossing for Afri, and the rest of us enjoy the descent from the rarefied air emitted by our more typical left-wing companions, the evidence of where we can go by directing our activism at the humanity that unites us.

On Sunday morning Kevin leads us to breakfast at a simple cafe in a busy market at the county showgrounds. Next to the cafe there’s an enormous shed with live poultry for sale, ducks and geese and chickens of every conceivable plumage making a racket in cages stacked in aisles. One can’t help but think of Susan’s reaction to visiting her child in the Marine brig in Quantico: “You wouldn’t keep an animal in the sort of conditions they’re keeping Bradley.”

Now Chelsea is in better conditions, able to communicate with loved-ones, getting more visitors. Susan plans, “fingers crossed”, to go to her child in the autumn. As we hug her and her family by the docks near Fishguard, we feel hopeful that they will go to Fort Leavenworth, and wherever else Chelsea’s needs take them, strengthened by our support and by the celebration we shared.

For more information and to make a contribution, see manningfamilyfund.org.
Chapter 3.6
Gaza Diary


Monday January 14, Cairo to Gaza City

We set out at 5 a.m., squeezed efficiently into a minibus, bags lashed to the roof, for what our driver claims is to be a four-and-a-half hour journey to the border crossing between Egypt and Gaza at Rafah. The first peachy light changes to a tawny murk over the Nile Delta out to our left; eventually an orange fireball raises over the Sinai ahead of us. Someone’s guidebook notes euphemistically that the northern Sinai is “inaccessible to tourists”, but that inaccessibility certainly cannot be attributed to the smooth four-lane highway that carries us across the Suez Canal, then between the dunes of the desert. The empty space is punctuated with military checkpoints at which our passports are repeatedly inspected. At one of them, we are made to wait for an escort. We don’t mind waiting: we’ve heard about the attacks that make Sinai dangerous territory, be they by Salafists bent on violence against the Egyptian state and assorted infidels, or by mere Bedouin bandits seeking to kidnap foreigners for profit or as bargaining chips in their own more parochial struggles. The Egyptian revolution has left much of Sinai increasingly lawless, the subject of travel warnings by Western governments and handwringing by geo-strategists.

The escort takes the form of a pick-up truck with police number plates and three armed men inside; for 40 minutes they drive before, behind and beside us. At another checkpoint a similar vehicle takes up the escort, but this time there are seven men responsible for our safety – though “men” is a big word for the three teenagers, clad in vaguely stylish civilian garb, who sit in the open air at the back of the pick-up, their AK-47s balanced between their knees. When, in the middle of nowhere, we stop for fuel
at a highly informal petrol pump, busy with Bedouins, our minibus is surrounded by seven friendly Kalashnikovs.

The last 40 miles, between the old resort at El-Arish and Rafah, are evidently the safest, and our armed friends vanish. When we descend, after a six-hour journey, from the minibus, our only true Arabic speaker, Jerusalem-born Palestinian and UCD graduate student Claudia Saba, is thrust forward to deal with what proves to be stubborn bureaucracy on the Egyptian side of the border. The Egyptian authorities – there are troublingly few of them in uniform, but we take them at their word as we hand over our passports outside the gate and are dispatched to wait at a rough-and-ready roadside coffee shop – claim they don’t have advance paperwork for three of us: the three whose visas and invitations were in fact processed first through the embassy in Dublin. We wait and watch in frustration as shiny Mercedes trucks arrive, one after the other, carrying the building aggregate that Qatar is supplying and Egypt permitting into Gaza as part of the ceasefire agreement from the November war.

We are, insistently, a group of ordinary Irish people, travelling to establish contacts with ordinary people in Palestine. But I feel more ordinary than most. All eight of my travelling companions are members of Gaza Action Ireland, a somewhat ad hoc successor to a really ad hoc organization, Irish Ship to Gaza, which built a broad coalition and raised lots of money to launch two marine missions in 2010 and 2011 to bring aid to the territory and raise consciousness about Israel’s naval blockade. Most of its members spent hard weeks at sea and in Israeli custody; they never reached Gaza. They know a thing or two about waiting, but it is frustrating to be stopped so close to their long-time destination.

Our phones are working, expensively, but the Egyptian consular officer in Dublin is off for the week, and the obstacles seem insurmountable for a couple of hours until
suddenly, inexplicably, they are surmounted. We are allowed through the gates to walk into a grand, Soviet-style “terminal” building, and wait some more at the “Passport Dept.” Eventually we pay some fees and some more fees and are allowed on a bus that carries us a few hundred metres across no-man’s-land, under a “Welcome to Palestine” sign and into the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian terminal is newer and nicer than the Egyptian one, and a minder from our host NGO is here to smooth our way. We are whisked past the twisted wreckage of the car in which the Hamas military leader Ahmed al-Jabari was blown up by Israel at the start of the November fighting – it didn’t happen here, but the remnants of the car have been brought to this spot as a part of a gruesome display for travellers. We sit in a VIP area where curtains and flags hide the breezeblock walls, and are served coffee. But the bureaucracy has not finished with us. After further delay Claudia and our coordinator, Fintan Lane, are taken into an office to be quizzed by a young Hamas security man. On emerging, Claudia is uninhibited and unimpressed: “He looked like a boy wearing his father’s suit. I kept waiting for his superior to turn up to ask the important questions. He was throwing them out at random because he knew he should ask us something but he wasn’t sure what.” Nonetheless we have got the message: Hamas knows we’re here, and does not appear to regard us as beneath, above or beyond politics.

We nine have made it our business to know something about Gaza – we’ve read the UN report that warns of “timebomb” pressure on resources like water as the population creeps toward and beyond 2 million – but none of us has been here before. On the trip from the border crossing to Gaza City, one of the things that strikes me is the sheer number of children and teenage boys everywhere – between the dilapidated buildings and the bombed ones, between the productive polytunnels and the craters in the middle of small farm fields.
Hamas, democratically elected by the people who live here, may be in charge of ‘security’ on the ground – it can’t do much about the threat from the air – but NGOs control a large proportion of the crucial resources. An index of this democratic deficit can be found in the fact that the man known as “the mayor of Gaza” is a pale-faced, overweight construction-management graduate from Nenagh, Co. Tipperary. Shane Middleton, who doesn’t bristle at the nickname, is project director here for a US-based global charity, CHF International. Unlike the likes of Oxfam, which has dozens of international staff in Gaza, CHF has just the one, Middleton, who leads a team of more than 100 local people, from social workers to engineers. Although most of its funding comes from USAID, CHF couldn’t put an American citizen in Gaza even if it wanted to: US government guidelines mark this out as a no-go area.1

Middleton has killer statistics – 65 per cent of people here are food-insecure; the average family size is 7.5; more than half the population is under 18 – as well as useful contacts, like the phone numbers for all 70 sports clubs in this small territory. He has off-the-record gossip. He has stories of the CHF projects that he thinks are doing some good to feed people: providing soil and seed for backyard gardens; or chickens and rabbits for people who have only rooftop space. Talking to him, I got a vivid sense of the frustration of working in a thoroughly abnormal situation in which the blockade is the central fact of life.

Tuesday, January 15, Gaza

I’ve dreamed of a drone named Delilah – that really is what the Israelis call the high-tech guided cruise missile that can follow you until she has confirmed the number plate

1 We will learn that this is the least of the restrictions that make the copious USAID money a laughing-stock, at best, in Gaza. The detailed “terrorism vetting” for projects above a certain dollar-amount would rule out most of the population if strictly applied. Toward the end of the week I meet a WorldVision staffer who tells me his organisation has stopped taking the American money for work in Gaza, because it meant they could not fund, say, a kindergarten that was named after a local “martyr”.
on your moped. If you turn around to look at her, she can run a face-recognition scan across your features. And if her operator – probably a real young woman in a base outside Tel Aviv – decides to press the button on her joystick, Delilah can blow up, shredding you and anything else nearby.

Most of Israel’s weapons are not so discriminating. We have already seen evidence of how efficiently they can bring down a building with their notorious double tap, boring a hole through the centre of the structure, then sending in a second explosive to destroy its foundations. On the high third floor of a building with just one wall left standing, we can see bright blue and yellow tiles depicting the Dome of the Rock, a decoration that once graced someone’s apartment. (The target was, it seems, a small metal workshop on the ground floor.) Now anyone passing by can enjoy the image, but the people who used to lived there and look at those tiles every day are gone.

Then there are the artillery shells that drop regularly into the buffer zone that seems to spread as far as 1.5km from the border with Israel, spreading bomblets across farmland. Lettuces are scarcely going to conceal gunmen, but the Israelis won’t let them be cultivated near the border, and regularly use weapons to “shave” in areas near their territory where Palestinians try to make things grow. Today is the funeral of a young farmer from north of here who, we are told, was shot in the head while working a full 1.2km from the border.

My ancient netbook’s cable has chosen this trip to make its final transition from dodgy to dead. I am also struggling to get my phone connected to the local networks; I feel cut off even by the standards of Gaza, where the main electricity supply is down for eight hours or more every day but most people have rigged noisy, smelly back-up generators and are attached to their mobiles. The phone sorts itself out – I can connect to an Israeli network – and I decide to contact “the mayor of Gaza” to see if he can tell me where to
find a new cable. Like the parish-pump TD he resembles, Shane Middleton gets the job
done with apparent ease.

I’ve been lucky with the Acer cable, but what gets in and out of Gaza has little to do
with traditional laws of supply and demand. The tunnels that connect Gaza to Egypt are
legendary – we hear a story about a fleet of new white Hyundai cars, stolen in
Benghazi, Libya, that found their way through those tunnels into Gaza a few months
ago. But for the last week they have been closed by what is effectively the “Ministry of
Tunnels”, after bad weather and a deadly collapse earlier this month. With the
smugglers’ premium on goods that arrive that way, and Israel-like prices for those that
squeeze “legitimately” through the blockade, the cost of living here is out of kilter with
the dead domestic economy: it’s no wonder most of the population relies on handouts to
survive. The needs of Israeli business, we’re told, are as influential in determining what
is allowed here as are humanitarian needs: when it became clear, for example, that
NGOs in Gaza were buying lots of compost, Israeli compost was suddenly allowed in
through Erez, and sold for a half-dollar per bag cheaper than locally produced stuff.

A quick visit to a small museum this morning reminds us how bizarre it is for this once-
beautiful, millennia-old port to lose its trading connections to the outside world. There
are artefacts of past occupiers and visitors: Roman, Egyptian, Byzantine, British. We
laugh at the note annotating a few coins, from the “British occupation period, 1917-48”.
One of us explains to the guide that “we don’t call it the British ‘mandate’ of Ireland
either”.

The kids on the street are concerned with other conflicts. Barca or Real Madrid? Surely,
they insist, everyone supports one or other of those teams. The divide cuts through
families here. Emboldened by our engagement with their ragged football talk, they
move on to the other big local rivalry. “Hamas, no,” says a teenager, making an X to
cross out his government with an index finger. “Fatah!” Nearly half the population turned out for a rally this month in support of Fatah, who rule the West Bank but were beaten thoroughly by Hamas here in 2006. Locals tell us that Fatah is not so much specifically popular right now as benefiting from a generic “kick the bums out” attitude toward Hamas; elections could happen this year, but don’t hold your breath.

At the grounds of Al-Helal Sporting Club, despite the bad winter weather, some of the clubhouse windows haven’t been replaced since being blown out in November’s bombings. The Israelis struck hard and repeatedly at this rough north-Gaza neighbourhood between the vast Jabalia refugee camp and a smaller, even more densely populated one by the sea, “Beach Camp”. Al-Helal is planning to move out of this place, having bought five hectares of land from the government in what used to be, before the 2005 withdrawal, the Jewish settlement of Nezarim, a few miles to the south. The senior team already plays its games there, on one of the very few grassy pitches in the Gaza strip. The club president, Amer Abu-Ramadan, tells me in broken English that the club has tried and failed to start a girls’ team. “The habits of the people of Gaza were not ready for this,” says his son Saleh, a law student.

It wasn’t the government that blocked the way to girls playing football? No, there is no resistance from the government, father and son insist. “We will try and try and try until we succeed,” the father says. He believes he leads one of the best clubs in Gaza: one of its players has been captain of the Palestinian national team. But he wants it also to be the club that achieves the gender breakthrough. Gaza is by no means Saudi Arabia – here, as in Egypt, women walk around with men, in groups containing all sorts of head-covering, from niqab to loosely tied headscarf to nothing at all – but it is a long, long way from equality in the sporting field.
For the boys we watch dancing around the field in the twilight, football is everything, club board-member Ayed Abu-Ramadan tells me. “With the sea full of sewage, these children can’t even go swimming.” Raji Sourani assures us that a German company has arrived to fix the sewage system destroyed by Israeli airstrikes – but only because the shit was spreading up the coast and affecting Israel. Sourani is a lawyer and former leftist revolutionary who has been jailed by both the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority and sentenced to death by Hamas; luckily Hamas was not in power at the time. Now he is the director and effective embodiment of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights. He knows Ireland: he has lectured with Michael D. Higgins, whom he evidently loves; he speaks admiringly of Micheál Martin; and expresses himself “disappointed” with Eamon Gilmore – the incredulous look on his face when recalling the Irish foreign minister’s brief visit to Gaza in January 2012 speaking louder than that one carefully chosen word.

Sourani has no love for Hamas, and PCHR has frequently come under pressure from its regime in Gaza. When he joined in a petition calling for captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to have basic legal rights as a prisoner, various local groups scheduled a demonstration at PCHR’s city-centre headquarters, and Sourani is convinced it would have resulted in the destruction of the offices if the leaders of Hamas and various militias had not called it off at the eleventh hour. Still, he says, Hamas are “part of us”. There are “extremists” in Gaza, to be sure – Islamic Jihad, sundry Salafists – and Sourani says the siege plays into their hands, but, secularist though he is himself, he does not count Hamas among them. He attributes many of Hamas’s worst failings – the struggle to provide infrastructure and public services, the repression of political opponents, the efforts to impose Islamic practice on a territory that, while more conservative than the West Bank, is culturally mixed – to their being thrust into government when they were unready for the responsibility.
After two hours of frank Q&A, we change our seating arrangements so the vegetarians and carnivores can face each other like negotiating factions and eat the most delicious spread of mezze. My new favourite salad is dagga gazawyya, a mortar-and-pestled mix in which tomatoes are just a delivery vehicle for raw garlic, chilis and dill.

*Wednesday, January 16, Gaza*

I am awakened at 1 a.m. by my returning roommate, Hugh Lewis. He tells me he was out chatting with local people in a downtown cafe, including a woman who described herself as a feminist. Like me, he had noticed that virtually everyone we spoke to and heard from yesterday was a man.

Our morning walk on the north Gaza beach brings us through a busy all-male workplace. Flat-bottomed skiffs and small motorboats are gathering shellfish near the shore, and ponies pull carts that bring loads of sand from the beach up the dunes to the only vaguely active building site we’ve seen: that of a beautiful new mosque that is rising above the sea. (The mosque’s sponsor is perhaps not getting the response he craved for his spiritual largesse: “he loves money too much” is about the nicest thing we hear from the many locals who volunteer a comment.)

We keep hearing that Gaza is not underdeveloped but deliberately “de-developed”, and that international aid, though essential, enables this Israeli-directed process. The presence of so many outside agencies means that although Israel ensures that Gaza mostly can’t trade, can barely fish, can’t build or rebuild (the latest supplies from Qatar and Israel barely touch the pent-up need) and has a reduced capacity to farm, it doesn’t quite starve, though half of children under three suffer from anaemia. Several people have said to us that they wish the foreign pillars of this literal welfare-state could be removed, and the raw consequences of Israeli policy be revealed, because then the
world would not tolerate it. In the absence of such a withdrawal, however, ‘de-
development’ – the steady disappearance of a normal functioning economy, connected
to the world – continues, unevenly but unquestionably. The most conspicuous enabler is
probably the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the
Near East (UNRWA), which provides primary healthcare and education for the two-
thirds of the Gaza population who are registered refugees – that is, people displaced in
the Nakba (“catastrophe”) of 1948, and the descendents of those people. (Half the
refugees live outside the official designated camps, though such is the crowding and
infrastructural chaos throughout Gaza that is not always easy to recognize the limits of
the camps anyway.)

UNRWA’s white cars and jeeps carry the whiff of colonialism as UN vehicles do
elsewhere in the world. Nonetheless, UNRWA’s 11,300-strong staff is almost entirely
Palestinian, and the ones we meet this morning in the health department seem proud of
their efforts in running 21 centres in Gaza, despite the constant budget squeeze from
Western countries, and the problems in getting spare parts for lab equipment owing to
the Israeli blockade and the destruction of many of their supply stores in the 2008–9
war.

It is a relief to be guided by a woman around the big, busy, rudimentary Al Remal
medical centre. In excellent English, Dr Ghada Al Jadba speaks frankly about abortion –
practised here only when the woman’s life is in danger – and is funny about efforts to
promote family planning: “After thirty years of talking to women we realized we were
trying to persuade the wrong people. Women want just two children themselves.
Husbands and mothers-in-law want ten!” A broad social campaign in favour of family
planning, including input from religious leaders who assure those husbands and
mothers-in-law that Islam has no difficulty with most forms of contraception, is now
having some success, she says. The pregnant woman whose gynaecological
appointment we interrupt (at the fully clothed stage, of course) is not exactly the best evidence for this: she is expecting her fifth child, and she fits the keep-trying-for-a-boy stereotype. She is conscious of this, and insists, translated by Dr Jadba, that she is an educated woman and is happy with her four daughters. Still, she says, the boy she is carrying comes from God.

As we leave Al Remal, we ask Dr Jadba to tell us where we are, exactly, on our “Gaza Tourist Map”. A lifelong resident of Gaza City, she rotates the map fruitlessly for a minute or two. So do a couple of men who come along, and we believe her when she says that map-reading is not part of their culture.

We find our way maplessly to our next meeting, with a network of NGOs. Here we are lightly chided for campaigning on “Gaza”. “The Israelis want this,” we’re told, as they seek to isolate Gaza from the rest of Palestine. A late-arriving woman in pink coat and brown headscarf, Ayah Bashir, tells of attending the World Social Forum in Brazil with a Palestinian women’s delegation – “five from Gaza, five from the West Bank, five from” – she hesitates slightly – “Palestine territory ‘48.” The women compatriots had much in common, she says, but flew home on three separate flights, to Cairo, Amman, and Tel Aviv.

Despite her hesitation about saying “Israel” – she was probably just being cautiously euphemistic in the presence of the older, strongly nationalist men who were running the meeting – Ayah Bashir, it turns out, is straight-talking and smart, qualities that, along with her impeccable English, endear her to us immediately. She is hoping to become Gaza’s first woman PhD in English literature – but it’s a struggle in a place where the blockade and poverty mean she has to do much of her scholarly research using Google Books.
Many offices here are equipped with long, two-part wooden tables of the sort seen in TV peace talks; it’s easy to imagine that they came in a job lot from the UN. So it is lovely this evening to sit instead on a comfortable sofa in front of a low coffee table to enjoy the hospitality of Bassan Al-Rayes and his wife Heba, who is the sister of a Palestinian friend back in Dublin. Their Tel Al-Hewa neighbourhood took a battering from drones, bombs and missiles in both recent wars – in November they and their children could scarcely stir from their home for the full eight-day assault – but their apartment is spacious and decorated with a spare and simple beauty; kids’ TV shows murmur from the next room.

Not long after we have cosily sat down, however, one of my fellow-travellers, Jim Roche, discovers he has lost his iPhone, probably either in or while getting out of a taxi. Bassan phones the taxi-man, who professes ignorance of the device. Bassan is inclined to believe him, so he and Jim disappear into the street.

Their prolonged absence gives me an opportunity to chat with the conservatively attired Heba, who is, it turns out, an authority on the Waldorf-Steiner system of child-centred education. She admits there is little room for such ideas to take hold in Gazan conditions, but her occasional work with a visiting German NGO has allowed her to develop her skills at making astonishingly and intricately beautiful toys from wool and cloth. She gives me a finger-puppet for my daughter and I name it after her smiling boy Ibrahim.

Three of her kids were born in the US, but Heba explains in perfect English that she would much rather stay in Gaza than return to, say, Orange County, California, where she and Bassan made their home in the early- and mid-1990s. She says that after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing – not, of course, the work of Muslims, though they were
the focus of suspicion for the first few hours – she was subjected to increasing levels of
direct racial abuse..

Thursday, January 17, Gaza

We long to talk to Palestinians without the gauze of “issues” coming between us. But this morning we must meet the fishermen.

Gaza seaport is a sad destination for most of our group, who yearned to sail into it as part of the aid flotillas. In the middle of the knot of men who gather around us, in the 18C sunshine that Palestinians greet with coats and woolly caps, Zakaria Bakr from the fishermen’s union lays down the facts, for more than twenty minutes and without reference to notes. Some of the facts come with visual aids: the fishermen who pull up their shirts to show bullet wounds in their bellies inflicted by Israel’s navy.

When Claudia Saba realizes today that she won’t be able to keep her appointment with a famous Gazan rapper, I offer to take her place: someone else’s great-sounding meeting magically transformed into my own. Down an unpaved road near the city centre, I find Mohammad Antar in a cafe smoking the ubiquitous sheesha pipe with his younger brother and a TV crew. Now in his mid-20s, Antar was a member of a rap group, DARG (“Da Arabian Revolutionary Guys”) Team, that gained some international notoriety. But he recalls some of their European tour-dates unfondly: Western activists seemed to view them as opportunities to express their solidarity with Palestine, rather than make a connection with the music. “Outside Gaza,” he says, “my work doesn’t make any sense for me.”

The members of DARG have gone their separate ways, but Antar continues to perform. As the videos he shows me on his phone demonstrate, he’s a powerful rapper, with music that blends Arab and Western influences. While people have been telling us that
Hamas has lightened up on its cultural crackdown – “they don’t want to appear like Taliban’, a local journalist says – this doesn’t extend to allowing Antar to perform, and he says he has been arrested for questioning several times. Not only does his music draw from decadent Western sources, but he attracts a sexually mixed audience; or, as he put it himself, “there’s no point in a party without girls”. His political lyrics also arouse suspicion, along with the stark fact that he gets funding from the Fatah ministry for culture based in the West Bank. Antar, like every other Palestinian in Gaza, can’t travel to the West Bank, so such funding might fairly be regarded as provocative. He shrugs: “If they search my lyrics they would see I am also against their [West Bank] regime.” Still, political rivalry gives him hope for brief liberation. “I’m waiting for the elections – a few weeks of freedom! I will perform in the street – like this!” He strikes a pose and raps. “Without any permission – like this!”

In the meantime Antar gets his message out on Facebook and YouTube – and through doing interviews like the one he has just completed with a local crew working for the leftish web-based global Real News Network. I decide to hitch a ride with the crew, which journalist Yousef Al-Helou is using to run around gathering material for more than one potential feature story. Next stop is in the heart of downtown, right next to the empty, grim “Gaza Mall”, an absurd staple of Israeli stories about the prosperous normality of life here. We ride the lift to the eighth floor. Here, at another negotiating table in the Center for Political and Development Studies, the Israeli-American writer Miko Peled has already started a lecture.

The 51-year-old Peled grew up in west Jerusalem, in a home where his mother remembered the day in 1948 when they acquired it and the displaced Palestinians’ coffee was still warm on the table. His father Mattiyahu was a Zionist fighter against the British, then an important general in the 1967 war, who later became a member of the Knesset and peace activist before his death in 1995. Miko, who had gone to live in the
US, was spurred by his teenage niece’s terrible death in a Jerusalem suicide bomb in 1997 to learn more about Israel’s history, and he now rejects Zionism as “about as far away from Judaism as you can get”. He is here in Gaza, of all places, touring his book, *The General’s Son*, and his meticulous deconstruction of the myths with which he grew up is perhaps the single most powerful set of words I have heard here. In a robust Q&A, he expresses his support for the boycott campaign against Israel. The boycott is a challenging tactic to discuss in Gaza, where the sugar for your tea probably comes in a Hebrew-language packet, and you definitely pay for it in Israeli shekels. But Peled passionately advocates for it. He dismisses concerns that cutting off contact with Israeli state-backed institutions, as the boycott campaign demands, reduces the chance of persuading Israelis of the justice of the Palestinian cause; he insists that Palestinians have no responsibility to include and educate Israelis in discussions of their plight. There is a frightening implication in his words: that most of his compatriots are beyond talking to, that a powerful global rejection of business-as-usual is the only message they’ll understand.

I have had misgivings for years about the boycott, precisely because of my residual liberal devotion to “dialogue”, and Peled’s words are still ringing in my ears as we speed away again, this time to a cultural centre and a staged reading of a play, *Tales of a City by the Sea*, by Palestinian-Canadian-Australian writer Samah Sabawi. The glamorous Sabawi is here, and explains to us beforehand that she has excised some of the play’s racier bits, and gone with a “reading” rather than a production, in respect of local sensitivities about characters holding hands and the like. It’s not clear if that was strictly necessary to secure permission for the performance, but certainly there is a sophisticated audience here of about 100 men and women. The play, in English, deals with the first (and only successful) blockade-busting flotilla in 2008, the war of the following winter, and the treatment of Palestinians abroad. The most striking aspect of it
is the brash, eloquent, dominant performances by the women actors. The Q&A afterwards is also female-dominated, moderated in two languages by our impressive new friend Ayah Bashir, with all the discussion from the floor coming from women. Some of us joke afterwards that perhaps men here need some help with empowerment, but the joke doesn’t especially amuse the Palestinian women with whom we share it.

Somehow we get back to the PCHR offices, where we are (absurdly in my case) awarded medals for our efforts on behalf of Palestinian rights. PCHR has taken the opportunity to invite a motley crew of supportive Gaza-based internationals into the office to share the honours and the food; most of our group – even the majority who have done time in Israeli jails – can’t help but feel the distinction between our occasional activism and the years of their lives given by everyone else in the room, British, Italian, French, Irish, Dutch, Palestinian.

Friday, January 18, Gaza to Cairo

We should be in a hurry, heading towards the Rafah crossing, because Friday opening is still a novelty and the earlier we’re there, the better our chances of reaching Cairo by nightfall. But Anwar, our PCHR minder, tells the driver to turn around, then head up an alley – no, not this one, the next one – because he wants to show us something, a site of destruction from November. Inwardly I groan, not only at the delay but because this sort of guided war-tourism makes me extremely uncomfortable; looking around, I can see I’m not the only one.

We get out of the van and climb over some rubble to yet another set of ruins. I leave my camera in my pocket, and I’m glad of that when I notice that a bearded young man with sad eyes and a brown fake-leather jacket has followed us up the alley to watch us peer into the remnants of an apartment block.
Back at the van I get Claudia’s translation of what happened here two months ago. The Israelis, it seems, telephoned their target. (Such phone-calls are not uncommon and are cited by defenders of Israel who say the IDF are the most humanitarian warriors ever.) The target was at home with his wife and children: the caller told him his building was about to be destroyed. He instantly gathered his family and fled the building, shouting at neighbours as he went. As they streamed down the alley, he was perhaps 50 feet away, here near where our van is parked, when sure enough the building was brought down by an air-strike. Part of a neighbouring building collapsed too, and five people were killed. Claudia points, inevitably, to the bearded guy with the sad eyes, which are still watching us: “This is that man.”

We reverse out of the alley, as he keeps watching.

**Home from Home: Immigration and the Irish Media**

This chapter addresses a combined documentary and book project, *Home from Home*, being undertaken by Harry Browne, a journalist, lecturer and Irish citizen born in Italy and raised in the United States, and Chinedu Onyejelem, a migrant cultural producer, journalist and naturalised Irish citizen from Nigeria. The collaborators have previously worked together on the *Irish Times*, where Browne was a member of staff and Onyejelem, then a recent migrant, was exploring his opportunities in Irish journalism. They continue to work together (Browne on a part-time basis) on the weekly ‘multicultural’ newspaper edited and published by Onyejelem, *Metro Eireann*.¹

The changing ethnic constituencies of the population are among the most dramatic developments to affect the economic, religious and social life of Ireland since the early 1990s. A number of efforts, journalistic and academic, have been made to summarise and comment upon this phenomenon, but most of them have hinged on the question of ‘racism’;² *Home from Home* is among the first wholly devoted to the stories and views of those who have lived through and embodied those changes³ – predominantly immigrants themselves, but also members of minority groups who were in Ireland prior to the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economic boom that started in the mid-1990s, and other Irish-born people who have been closely associated with the changes, their causes and their effects through work and/or activism.
To initiate an essentially public project such as this one requires an engagement with and understanding of the wider discourse about immigration, race and ‘interculturalism’ (the term often now preferred to ‘multiculturalism’) that exists within Irish society, especially in its public spheres. *Home from Home* is intended to be a populist intervention with widespread media publicity and direct access to the airwaves through its radio incarnation. Radio, the most technologically adaptable approach to such a project, is also the most important medium or sphere in Ireland both for popular discourse on issues of public importance and for the narration of personal stories.

The project draws upon one-to-two-hour interviews with at least forty people, chosen to be as representative as such a small ‘sample’ can be with regard to gender, economic position, ethnic origin and language (translators are used as needed). The interviews range from biographical detail to political outlook and all points between. Rather than advertising for interviewees, we proceed via the journalistic method, whereby contacts beget contacts. For example, a chance encounter on a Kerry hillside resulted in an interview between former colleagues Browne and Hester Storm, which moves across many shared experiences and is rather awkwardly and audibly pervaded by a sense of friendly ‘catching-up’. This might well have been disastrous if the interview were being presented as a coherent whole; it posed fewer difficulties in light of the editorial methodology outlined below. Nonetheless, this sort of *ad hoc* sourcing of subjects clearly has dangers, in terms of yielding ‘findings’ based on an essentially closed, albeit large, circle of subjects. Care is taken in this respect, and such findings as we present will be duly contingent and particular, avoiding unsupportable generalisation.

The book will not present the interviews serially but will use excerpts, ranging generally from about forty to four hundred words, arranged in thematic chapters; this chapter structure will, in turn, generate thematic programmes for a radio series. In as much as the project crosses media, it attempts to adopt a single editorial strategy for
both book and audio form; radio audiences should, for the most part, be able to ‘read along’ by referring to the book. The idea is to get a number of ‘voices’ (at least eight per chapter/programme) talking about a particular subject or category of experience, implicitly developing, commenting upon and even contradicting each other. Such a method should allow for certain ‘big picture’ ideas to emerge organically, while at the same time clearly emphasising the diversity, complexity and subjectivity of people’s experiences.

This has a significant bearing methodologically. The fundamental building block of the finished product will be words rather than voices; excerpts will be joined together based on what the interviewees say rather than how they say it. This dictates that auditory effects conjuring particular spaces will be absent, or at least homogenised as much as possible, and even what might conventionally be regarded as the dangers to listenership of, for example, a series of heavily-accented voices in succession will be ignored. The rhythm, too, will be uneven, with clips ranging in length from only ten seconds to several minutes. This should not be seen as the subordination of the form of this project to the literary one; on the contrary, the concept of succeeding and contending voices is one that can be said to derive from the tradition of the radio documentary more than from any print medium. German documentarist Helmut Kopetsky believes ‘that the competition between strong opinions is a vital and driving force in feature programmes’ (cited in Crook 1999: 213).

Interviewees will be clearly identified except where legal or personal considerations dictate anonymity; we envisage too that only ‘legal or personal’ considerations would lead to any significant editorial alteration from the transcripted interviews, though these would of course be subject in general to some cutting and ‘smoothing’ to ensure they are lively and readable. But the dual-media format does place some limitations on that process. The more limited editing possible in audio as compared to print helps to keep
the finished product ‘honest’; for example, when Haseeb Ahmed from Pakistan talks about his experience working in the Holiday Inn, the result is necessarily and awkwardly idiomatic.

At present fewer than half the interviews and one sample chapter, on experiences of employment in Ireland, have been completed. Most interviews have been free-flowing, relaxed and forthright. The tone and temperament of the book is emerging in large part from what its subjects have to say about themselves and, crucially, about Ireland. On the basis of material generated so far, it should include some sharp and negative comments about the state and society of Ireland as they confront a diverse new population in pursuit of the ‘Irish Dream’.

Between 1996 and 2002, a period of unprecedented economic growth, the state had a net immigration of more than 150,000 people (Central Statistics Office 2002: 10-11), a huge figure for a population of slightly below four million, though returning Irish-born emigrants make up roughly half of in-migrants. Close analysis of the 2002 census suggests that the number of residents born elsewhere was 137,000 greater than in 1996, with perhaps 20,000 of these being Irish nationals born abroad (Fitzgerald 2003). Arguments continue about the reliability of data on some immigrant populations, with estimates of the number of Chinese-born residents ranging from 6,000 to several times that number. Nigerians, officially estimated in 2002 at about 10,000, were the largest foreign-born community apart from Americans and Britons; since then Ireland, with only one per cent of the EU’s total population, has continued to be the most significant single European destination for asylum seekers from Nigeria. More recently, the expansion of the European Union in 2004 and 2007 has changed the character of immigration in Ireland, with the large majority now coming from the accession states.
The reliability of the asylum figures as an indication of non-work-permit and non-visa immigration has probably declined, as it becomes clear that Ireland’s asylum system offers few opportunities for success or employment. The number of people living outside the state’s statistical net has undoubtedly grown. Despite successive governments’ efforts at geographic dispersal (meant to have a discouraging effect on would-be asylum seekers who might like Dublin but hate Longford), the capital, in particular its poorer residential and commercial districts, is where the new diversity is most evident.

Since *Home from Home* is intended to be both a popular book and a populist intervention on radio, our practice requires a critical engagement with mass-media practice more than it does with academic output. The context for any such engagement is the extraordinary continuing absence of non-white, non-Irish practitioners in virtually all Irish media, despite the presence of many experienced journalists among recent immigrants to the country. The reasons for this failure to open the columns and airwaves are manifold, and certainly not all sinister. They include the increased ‘professionalisation’ of media practice, whereby entry to employment comes largely through third-level courses accessed through a centralised process that reifies performance on a standard examination based on a set curriculum. As a result, classrooms full of future journalists and documentarians remain almost exclusively white and Irish.

Access by immigrants to professional training would not, however, be sufficient to open up the Irish media environment, which – perhaps incongruously, given its professionalisation – does often operate on the basis of close-knit and long-established social networks. The presence in Dublin of several well-run and highly respected ‘national’ media organisations may, for observers, obscure the fact that they exist in a relatively small capital city of only one million people, often likened to a ‘village’ by its elite. Breaking into the village media elite is far from impossible, but both *Home from*
Home creators are, as immigrants, familiar with the opportunities and suspicions it offers to outsiders. (Nonetheless, both have stepped sufficiently far ‘inside’ to make this project reasonably attractive to publishers and broadcasters.)

In the latter half of 2004, a process began with a view to licensing a Multi-Cultural Broad Format Sound Broadcasting Service for Dublin. The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) received two applications. Failte FM, a proposed co-operative, said its programme service would be ‘based around the principle of multiculturalism and empowerment’ and would aim to ‘develop a strategy of training and capacity building to promote the participation and integration of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and travellers within the wider Dublin society’. Global94.9 FM, submitted by Metro Eireann, targeted the ‘new Irish, old Irish, the hidden people, the invisible people, tourists, the person beside you on the bus’. According to the promoters, it would ‘be a voice for all the diverse peoples of Dublin’; it would aim ‘to promote cross-cultural understanding and co-operation among the various different cultures in our capital city and part county [and to serve] as a tool for creating cross-cultural bridges, empowering ethnic minority groups, encouraging self-reliance and fostering a positive outlook’. The innovative aims and objectives outlined in these applications were destined to remain unfulfilled; the state’s regulator decided that the time had not yet come to license a new ‘multicultural’ radio service.

At this point it is worth noting that the period of economic boom, and therefore labour-market pressure, has meant that significant sections of government and media here see the ‘flexibility’ provided by immigration as an essential element of growth. In recent governments this tendency was personified politically by the small, centre-right Progressive Democrat (PD) party, largely liberal on social policy but free-market ideologues. The PD leader, Mary Harney, consistently pushed in the late 1990s for higher numbers of work permits and visas to serve the needs of Irish and multinational...
industry; her colleague Liz O’Donnell simultaneously used her junior-ministerial post as a platform for a ‘compassionate’ attitude to immigrants. Both were conspicuously in opposition to the more hardline attitudes emanating from the Department of Justice.

In recent years the party’s face on this issue has been the harder one of Michael McDowell, the Minister for Justice responsible for introducing in 2004, following a referendum, constitutional change to deny the babies of immigrants the automatic right to Irish citizenship.

The mainstream print and broadcast media, in which PD thinking is often said to have disproportionate influence, has been slow to embrace the tougher, McDowell posture; however, one does hear fewer ‘liberal’ complaints about, for example, asylum seekers being barred from taking paid employment, a recurrent theme in the late 1990s. The year 2004, with its referendum on citizenship, may yet be seen as a landmark in the evolution of racialised discourse in Irish media. An ongoing project, ‘Conflation, Construction and Content’, has subjected the dominant media’s production, content and reception, in respect of new migrants, to critical sociological scrutiny. Eoin Devereux and Michael Breen argue that ‘the problematising of immigrants [in terms of crime or welfare fraud, for example] within Irish media discourse conforms to the wider tendency of the mainstream media always to demonise the most marginalised in society’ (2004: 185). They offer, however, only scant anecdotal evidence of such problematising/demonising, drawn largely on research carried out in the 1990s by journalist Andy Pollak (1999). Indeed, they state that ‘the Irish people are well served ... by the high quality of journalism found in radio, television and the broadsheet newspapers’ (2004: 171). While not inclined to concur on the general excellence of Irish journalism, we would argue that the media record to date is no more shameful than might have been expected.
Although social activists may rightly complain about effective and structural anti-immigrant bias in the dominant media, and some critiques have identified clear if narrow areas of concern about effectively racist practice (see Pollak 1998, 1999; and Reilly 2004), broadcast media are a distinctly mixed bag in which there are often many ‘positive’ ingredients. This is not particularly brave on the media’s part: there is, as yet, no significant, identifiable constituency that genuinely and deeply perceives immigration as a threat, either socially, culturally or economically; anti-immigration political candidates, such as those attached to the much-abused Immigration Control Platform, have performed very poorly in elections. The deeply racialised discourse about immigration, and asylum in particular, that splashes across the British tabloid media is relatively speaking invisible in Irish media – although not in Ireland, given the daily availability of many British papers.

Media such as talk-radio do like to pose issues in terms of ‘for’ and ‘against’. That means that in order to set up a ‘debate’ about race and immigration it is considered important to have someone who is, objectively, racist to take one side of the issue. For years, radio broadcasts in Ireland have been content to observe this unappetising convention in relation to the native population of nomadic Travellers. The shocking levels of invective and (effectively racial) stereotyping that have characterised this debate have only occasionally been repeated in relation to immigrants; most broadcasters, it seems, would rather avoid the ‘debate’ entirely than pursue its ugly possibilities.

To say that the discourse which does appear is usually, in the end, ‘about’ and cautiously ‘pro’ immigrants and members of ethnic minority groups is not at all the same as saying that it is ‘by’ and ‘for’ them. This is in large part where enterprises such as Metro Eireann and Home from Home come in. But it is too simplistic to posit that what we are doing is a straightforward ‘corrective’ to otherwise well-meaning but
hopelessly ignorant and uninvolved media peers. Our work is indeed ‘by’ immigrants, in the sense that we both grew up outside Ireland, but we are integrated citizens, playing full roles in what might be called the ‘host society’ as well as pursuing, to varying degrees (Onyejelem far more than Browne), subcultural projects; this immediately differentiates us from many or most of our immigrant peers. Although one can imagine a publicity campaign that suggested otherwise, our book and radio series will not be ‘by’ those people who are interviewed; however much we strive to respect their views and experiences, the process of selection and editing inevitably alienates it from their words – words that have themselves been coaxed out in interview.

It is not in the nature of a project such as Home from Home to agonise excessively about these limitations. As is standard journalistic practice, subjects consent to having their words and voices used, under our complete editorial control, and this is assumed from the moment they agree to be interviewed, within the constraints imposed by a request that some material be anonymous or ‘off the record’. ‘While it might be desirable to show material to subjects prior to publication/broadcast – as was Susan Knight’s (2001) practice – it is not feasible in this case, given the montage uses to which we are putting even short snatches of speech. It is unlikely that at any point we will produce full transcripts of each interview from which to select material; journalistically, we cut straight to the selection.

While we might like to think of immigrants and members of ethnic minorities as a potential audience for this project, no commercial publisher would dare to get involved in a venture in which such a group would be the limit or even the mainstay of the would-be market. As we have heard on more than one occasion from potential commissioners of this work, the project must not be ‘about’ interculturalism, nor simply ‘about’ the people whose words will appear in print and be sounded on the airwaves. It must be ‘about’ Ireland.
Radio Matters

The recent history of radio confirms similar priorities; immigrants may be the material from which this discourse is constructed, but they are not its subject. Thus, for example, a blandly unobjectionable and, inevitably, prize-winning radio documentary series made in 1999 about immigrant families was called, absurdly, *The New Irish* – a moniker that turned up again in an *Irish Times* print series in 2004. Much as we might like to think of our project as breaking new ground in this regard, it is unlikely to progress without at least some strong ‘new Ireland’ component. There is nothing particularly smug about this self-conscious requirement that one says something about ‘Irishness’; the national drama is likely to take centre stage in any small, postcolonial country with a significant history of ‘loss’ through oppression and out-migration. Our challenge is to find a practice that both recognises this narrative convention – we do, after all, intend to put this work in the marketplace – while simultaneously acknowledging its limitations. At the same time, being coherently ‘about’ anything other than Ireland is a difficult matter given the sheer diversity of migrant constituencies, ranging from Africans in the irregular economy through Vietnamese refugees from the 1970s and Indian computer programmers on work visas to EU citizens from outside Ireland. The notion of distilling any singular experience of displacement and migration is dispelled quickly when, in an interview for *Home from Home*, recent arrival Emiliana Volpe from Italy rather unpersuasively explained her move to Ireland as simply a case of late post-adolescent, world-is-my-oyster indecisiveness.

Our interviewing process and editing plans suggest a method that is rather *ad hoc*. Our interviews are wandering affairs, with people encouraged to speak about what they like, to follow tangents wherever they may go, but that won’t be the form in which the interviews eventually appear. A thematic organisation of our material will mean that stories will, literally, be taken out of context; that juxtapositions will be used to create
effects not intended by any of the interviewees; that a composite ‘big picture’ will be painted, in which an individual’s story may provide no more than a couple of brushstrokes. This won’t be an accidental consequence of the process; it’s what we’re hoping to achieve, both because ‘coherence’ and accessibility are critical necessities when presenting our work to a wider public, and because, one hopes, some arguments are likely to emerge.

The adaptation of this project into a radio format is entirely appropriate, given the widespread consumption of radio in a relatively small island such as Ireland. David Hendy’s archetypal comment about the medium globally – ‘its profile in the social landscape is small and its influence large’ (2000: 3) – is arguably only half-true in Ireland, where radio’s profile in the social landscape is considerable. For example, the uncertain prospect of a minor scheduling change more than a year ahead at RTÉ Radio 1, the flagship radio service of the state broadcaster, was treated as front-page news in the country’s highest-circulation newspaper (see Nolan & Cusack 2003).

Interestingly, given the discussion about radio’s role for immigrants and as a tool for integration, it has been seen in the past as a force for social disintegration. In the 1950s, it was cited in an official government document as a significant factor in encouraging Irish out-migration, and in 1956 a report by a government commission on emigration stated that, because of radio, ‘people [are] becoming aware of the contrast between their way of life and that of other countries, especially in urban centres’ (quoted in Brown 1985: 184). Nowadays, while radio listenership in Ireland is predictably divided according to class and age demographics, with younger and poorer listeners tending to prefer pop-music stations, speech radio is the most broadly popular radio format; almost all the highest-rated programmes are variations on the news or current affairs theme, and almost all are broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1. Up to 20 per cent of the adult population tunes in to some part of the two-hour Morning Ireland programme on any given day. Even on
RTÉ’s pop-music service, 2FM, the top-rated *Gerry Ryan Show* is dominated by current-affairs-based interviews and phone-ins rather than music; although the material tends to be light, ‘lifestyle’ oriented or ‘human interest’, this programme has often featured discussion of ‘serious’ global topics such as the wars in the Middle East or the issues associated with immigration.

While Ryan is occasionally opinionated in a populist way, presenters with overt political convictions are very much the exception in Irish radio, not only on RTÉ but on local and national commercial stations as well. The culture is one of studied ‘neutrality’ – a posture that of course tends to reify the *status quo ante*, although not to the point of explicit nostalgia for a period prior to the ‘waves’ of in-migration that began in the early 1990s. In 1997 Eamon Dunphy, a presenter on a national commercial station, broke the taboo against opinions on an evening drivetime programme when the discussion was about immigration: ‘There is the position: he commented, ‘and this would be closest to my own point of view, that Ireland is too small, it does not have the economy or the infrastructure to support large numbers of immigrants...’ This was probably as near as any national presenter came to ‘hate radio’ - certainly far short of the sort of talk, from the likes of Rush Limbaugh, with which US listeners are familiar. However, at the time Dunphy’s programme was a ‘two-hander’, with an openly ‘liberal’ co-host, and his posturing could conceivably be justified in terms of ‘balance’. When Dunphy took over sole presenting of the programme, he didn’t repeat such a statement, and indeed his programme’s popular comedy sketches occasionally dealt with immigration in ways that were highly sympathetic to asylum-seekers (portraying them as passive victims of an insensitive system).

The taboo on opinionated presenters, however, has not entirely prevented variations on ‘hate radio’ from taking hold in Ireland. In what is probably best described as an unhappy coincidence, the late 1990s, a period of unprecedented in-migration, were...
golden years in Dublin local radio for free-wheeling late-night phone-in programmes. Again, the presenters – most famously Chris Barry and Adrian Kennedy – adopted postures of ‘neutrality’, but this rarely extended to the insertion of accurate information into the bitter and often abusive discourse supplied by ‘callers’ (often, in fact, carefully pre-programmed provocateurs). In the shout-filled midnight hours of these briefly popular and influential programmes, ‘sponger’ was synonymous with ‘refugee’, and ‘immigrant’ was the rhetorical equivalent of ‘asylum-seeker’. These programmes were the home of many persistent urban myths concerning luxury items such as cars, homes and mobile phones purchased by the state for ‘these people’. Occasionally, one of ‘these people’ was allowed on-air to speak about persecution in his or her country of origin, or the desire to work rather than depend on social welfare in Ireland, but it was easy for other callers, and listeners, to accommodate these presumably ‘exceptional’ individuals in an otherwise thoroughly racist worldview. Indeed, it was not uncommon for the immigrant caller to end up differentiating him/herself from less-principled peers.

By late 2003, such radio discussions had largely disappeared from the airwaves. In fact, in December of that year, on RTÉ’s own late-night talk show, Tonight with Vincent Browne, the presenter unhesitately labelled a guest a ‘racist’. Browne’s relatively easy target was Justin Barrett, well known anti-immigration (and anti-abortion, and anti-EU) campaigner, who was expressing views that would have put him on the liberal wing of the Dublin phone-in shows five years earlier. Such ‘progress’ needs to be measured in the context of, on the one hand, a persistently monocultural broadcasting environment, and, on the other, the complex cultural politics of immigration and representation. It is a well known media-world ‘fact’ that an English accent is a virtual bar to regular on-air employment in the Irish broadcast media. (The often rather anglicised accents of many upper-class Irish people are only slightly more welcome). Rodney Rice, presenter and producer of RTÉ’s World Apart programme,
argued that accent was also one of the factors militating against the inclusion of immigrants in the broadcast media. However generalisations about accents and the under-representation of immigrants and ethnic minorities in the media should not lead us to make hasty assumptions about the pervasiveness of racist discourse; whenever Nelson Mandela or Archbishop Desmond Tutu speak in public or on radio in Ireland they receive a thunderous ovation.

**Broadcasting Practice: Conventions and Taboos**

The broadcasting environment in Ireland is more open than those of us who like to imagine ourselves in heroic resistance to hegemonic forms of cultural oppression want to imagine. Conservatives would certainly argue that the hegemony may even run the other way: an annual prize for ‘media and multicultural’ initiatives to ‘promote cross-cultural understanding’, initiated by Metro Eireann, has won sponsorship from RTÉ, the Irish Times and even the state’s own Reception and Integration Agency, a division of the oft-demonised Department of justice. This is not simply a matter of ‘liberals’ strategically placed in RTÉ, the Irish Times and elsewhere. The discourse of labour-market flexibility already discussed has a considerable hold on broadcast media. For as long as spokespeople for the employers’ organisation, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), can be heard complaining about the difficulties of obtaining work permits for immigrants, there remains a reasonable fit between broadcasting practice in the current affairs realm (in which IBEC is a privileged ‘source’ of news and views) and liberal ‘compassion’.

It is no exaggeration to say this gives rise to a rhetorical farrago when immigration is being defended: confusion about whether to highlight human rights, global justice, cultural diversity or capitalist opportunity often means that words evoking all four spill out together. From this jumble, extraordinary generalisations emerge. For
example, in 2003 RTÉ radio presenter Pat Kenny, interviewing former Irish President and UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson, spoke admiringly of the ‘docility’ of immigrants: ‘If you tell them that what they have to do to get on here in Ireland is go on social welfare, they’ll go on social welfare; if you tell them they have to work twenty-three hours a day, they’ll work twenty-three hours a day.’ The implication that immigrants should be allowed to exercise the latter option was clear, and Robinson did not contradict it.

Those who wish to exploit immigrant labour have had remarkable success, especially in broadcast media, in portraying this desire as a matter of extending rights to ‘non-Irish nationals’. Only a decade after immigration began to rise dramatically, it is now a media truism that ‘immigrants do the jobs Irish people won’t do’ – jobs Irish people were doing in the living memory even of Irish teenagers. The elementary economic facts of this matter – that temporary work permits for migrant labourers help to keep wages depressed in low-skill occupations, perpetuating the unattractiveness of such jobs to Irish workers; that a ‘black economy’ of immigrants without work permits has further low-wage effects – are rarely acknowledged, even by Irish trade unionists. It is only occasionally acknowledged that ‘non-nationals’ tend to be working well below their level of skill and training, or that the system whereby employers control work permits is a licence for exploitation.

The disproportionate number of immigrants caught up in the criminal-justice system is also a subject that is largely taboo. In Ireland (unlike Britain) ascribing racism, individually or structurally, to police and the courts is very rare, and the question of crime and punishment for migrants and other minorities faces not only that discursive bottleneck but also the more liberal fear of appearing to suggest that members of ethnic minorities are more prone to crime. (Irish people have, of course, been on the receiving end of both racist practice and stereotyping in other jurisdictions, especially Britain.)
*Home from Home* is attempting to confront this issue, and at least one chapter/programme will deal with experiences of ‘justice’. So far, one interviewee, Guylaine Klaus-Corsini, has told stories based on her experience as an unconventional teacher in Mountjoy women’s prison, where the guards were alternately curious, condescending and cruel.

It’s not surprising that pro-immigration campaigners, and multicultural newspaper *Metro Éireann* as their most directly accessible medium, take whatever rhetorical opportunities come their way, whether it’s patronisingly ascribing ‘cultural vibrancy’ to every African woman who buys a yam on Parnell Street, or accepting a strategic alliance with employers seeking the freedom to draw on a globalised reserve army of unemployed. There is an underlying assumption in much media discussion of immigration, *Home from Home* potentially included, that such reportage is intended to persuade a white Irish audience that immigration should be more acceptable. Ironically, in ‘seeking to be socially responsible’, as practitioners sometimes describe it, they may actually eschew the complexity and questioning that a genuinely responsible practice demands. For example, while some few liberal journalists have probed at the alliance with employers and exposed workplace abuse of migrants by white Irish bosses, class division and exploitation within immigrant communities in Ireland remains an almost entirely prohibited subject. In the course of our research we found that many immigrants working in immigrant businesses face appalling levels of exploitation (see, for example, Onyejelem 2003). The taboo on this very serious and delicate issue extends to academic discussion as well as mass-media coverage of immigration issues. It’s a taboo we are especially keen to break with *Home from Home*.

Radio is a particularly crucial forum for multiculturalist ‘persuasion’ of white Irish listeners, and for the portraits of Irish society that are the preferred format for such persuasion. As Stephen Barnard has pointed out, its capacity as an instrument of hegemonic
ideas of the ‘nation’ have often been the stuff of sinister fiction: ‘Throughout literature, film and popular culture in general, radio has traditionally been seen as a repressive influence, controlling thought processes and inspiring either mindless compliance or apathy’ (2000: 19). Barnard also argues that the medium has only a limited capacity to treat social problems as being anything more than an accumulation of individual problems, perhaps to be overcome with a spirited argument and a timely editorial intervention: ‘Individualism … finds its most potent expression in radio programming through a focus on aspiration and achievement, on solving problems…’ (2000: 224).

The aura of ‘persuasion’ in programming on ethnic-minority issues is highlighted by the fact that, at the BBC – serving a far more developed and coherent set of immigrant and ethnic communities than exist in Ireland – such shows are funded from the education budget. Yet as Barnard argues, ‘there remains an unmistakable sense of dispensed liberal favour about the programmes that result’ (ibid.). Barbara Savage’s (2002) study of the history of an important US radio show, Town Meeting of the Air, reveals how such favour was dispensed rather freely during World War II, with spirited discussion programmes about race in America, then withheld for three years after the war’s end. Such manipulation is scarcely surprising: during the nation’s anti-fascist crusade, there was heightened consciousness of the need to view the US as being on its own march toward greater freedom and equality, while the anti-communist crusade that followed the war made civil rights campaigners rather more suspect. Savage cites the difficulties faced even during the latter part of the war by the African-American writer Langston Hughes:

Recounting that ‘liberal’ network executives lacked the political resolve to air a dramatic series about African Americans which he had repeatedly proposed to them, Hughes concluded: ‘I DO NOT LIKE RADIO, and I feel that it is almost as far from being a free medium of expression for Negro writers as Hitler’s air-lanes are for the Jews: (2002: 235)
Of course, for every citation of radio as an instrument of genocide (as in Rwanda in 1994), the medium has been seen as offering opportunities for revolutionary mobilization. Commenting on the situation in Algeria, Frantz Fanon wrote: ‘Suddenly radio has become just as necessary as arms for the people in the struggle against French colonialism’ (cited in Lewis & Booth 1989: 139). The manifesto of French Radio Alice, one of the anarchist-oriented Tree-radio’ movements in Europe in the 1970s, stated: ‘We did not see radio as solely a political means but also a possibility of organising the experience of homogeneous communities’ (cited in Lewis & Booth 1989: 143).

But what about heterogeneous communities? In his study of British broadcasting in the early-to-mid 1990s, Paddy Scannell writes:

British Asians and Caribbeans have often been arbitrarily yoked together in ‘ethnic minority’ programmes in attempts to satisfy both ... An intrinsic difficulty for mainstream broadcasting is that ... it is hard to avoid the ghetto effect - of bracketing out the minorities in special ‘minority’ programmes that are ignored by the majority and do not always appeal to the minority. On the other hand, it is often unclear what kind of representation is being demanded. (1995: 35)

The alternative that he saw emerge in mid-decade was self-produced, licensed, ‘ghetto’ broadcasting.

In Ireland, RTÉ’s stuttering effort, beginning early in 2000, to create a catch-all Radio One World for all immigrants in Ireland was a resounding failure. For reasons internal to RTÉ and with disastrous editorial consequences, the new service was based in Cork rather than Dublin, and for two hours each weeknight it broadcast a hotchpotch of speech and music on a little-known medium-wave frequency. Its marketing among ethnic minorities was poor, and the most that can be said is that it provided some broadcasting opportunities for a few people otherwise conspicuously excluded from the state’s airwaves. The service disappeared within two years, replaced by an occasional wandering weekly half-hour programme on RTÉ Radio 1. This gave way in 2003 to the
still vaguer and more watery *Different Voices*, which by abandoning a ‘global’ remit and instead simply ‘embracing diversity’ was able to do away with foreign-sounding presenters in favour of the unthreatening voice of a ‘nice Irish woman’. Relaunched in 2004 as a 12-part series, it once again adopted a more ‘global’ approach and was presented by Cameroonian Guy Bertrand Nimpa.\(^{12}\) It was succeeded in 2006/7 by *Spectrum*, a distinctly mild-mannered programme submerged in the low-listening ghetto of Sunday evening. A far more successful site of ‘inclusion’ in Irish radio has been the not-for-profit community-radio sector. Beset by ‘amateurism’ and poor resourcing, the best of these stations have nonetheless developed some ‘subcultural’ visibility among immigrants. An interesting example is on the northside of Dublin, where community-station NEAR FM has developed some African listenership, partly with local programming such as *Majority World*, but also by re-transmitting Radio France Internationale, a service that particularly targets francophone African listeners in Africa and elsewhere.

There is no little irony, of course, in the fact that a small Dublin station reaches a local audience of recent immigrants by re-broadcasting this most global of radio services direct from Paris, one of the old centres of the European global empire. If, as Hendy has written, ‘creating a sense of place is one recurring theme of radio’s meaningfulness in modern life’ (2000: 177), it becomes necessary to ask how the phenomenon of migration, within and across national frontiers, affects our ‘localised’ perception of the medium’s role. After all, as Hendy continues:

[T]here is also our sense of space to be considered: that in transmitting its signals over many hundreds of miles, and in allowing us in our domestic lives to be ‘connected’ to events and people beyond physical reach, radio somehow transforms our sense of space *between* different places. (Ibid.)

Quoting Judy Berland and her writing on radio as a ‘space-binding’ medium, Hendy writes:
[Radio], permitting rapid dissemination of information across ever larger areas, also ‘erode [s] local memory and the self-determination of peripheral groups ... People’s feelings about community, about territory, work and weekends, roads and traffic, memory and play, and what might be happening across town’ are seized by radio so that it can ‘map our symbolic and social environment’. (2000: 188)

But radio, while perhaps eroding the identity of peripheral groups, can only cope with so much change. The medium is likely to be less successful in mapping those regions of a symbolic environment that are home to real-life re-location and, indeed, dislocation. The movement of people, therefore, poses particular difficulties for radio’s role in binding space and creating a sense of place.

**Life Stories**

How then are questions of space and place addressed in *Home from Home*, with its emphasis on ‘oral history’? How can we validly take individual autobiographical testimony and fit it into larger questions about group behaviour and social change in early twenty-first-century Ireland? In previous eras and across different cultures, it might have been taken for granted that stories of particular individuals could not be abstracted from wider social issues. Much recent sociological work using autobiographical methods, while based on individually-told stories, nonetheless treats families, groups or communities, rather than the individuals themselves, as the irreducible subject. This has arisen partly through a conjunction of the rising interest in social history and a sort of campaigning social work: ‘It was oral historians, some of whom were or became social practitioners, who already in the early 1980s adopted life-history methods as an emancipatory tool, and launched the concept of “empowerment” as a key concept in welfare practice’ (Chamberlayne *et al.* 2000: 2). At the same time, academic postmodernism has surely done away with the essentialist assumptions about the ‘typicality’ of individuals, and the breezy non-concern with the researcher’s
mediation, that we find in a previous generation of social researchers, as in Charles H. Cooley’s classic summary from the first half of the twentieth century:

We may study closely actual person [sic] or groups and use the perspective thus gained as a core upon which to build an understanding of other persons or groups, and eventually of the whole complex. In somewhat the way a naturalist hidden in a tree-top with his camera watches and records the nesting behaviour of a pair of birds, hoping by a series of such studies to understand those of the species. (1930: 331)

This might still act as a mission statement for some journalists (for whom the taxi-driver is generally the archetype of the species), but social scientists will be more wary. Ken Plummer speaks for a later age when he describes the approach of Cooley and other 1930s researchers in the ‘Chicago School’ of ‘symbolic interactionists’ as ‘important but in the end untenably naïve’ (2001: 115).

Following the terminological guidelines set by Daniel Bertaux (1981) and Stephen Tagg (1985), our own approach follows a ‘life story’ method, as opposed to ‘life history’, ‘autobiographical’ or ‘case history’, because it relies solely on the interviewee’s oral account. The cautiousness in Tagg’s general endorsement of life-story interviewing is particularly applicable to Home from Home: ‘The method ... can present problems, for example ... when a series of stories are to be combined or contrasted’ (1985: 163). One such problem our practice raises, of course, is whether what was at the time it took place a life-story interview can still go by that name once it has been chopped and changed and combined with other similar interviews to create some effect external to its own original logic.

A provisional answer is provided by Bertaux, who points to a larger purpose in such methodology. In the course of perhaps the most coherent, and probably the most passionate, case for life stories as an alternative to quantitative social-research methods, he writes, ‘this approach yields ... a direct access to the level of social relations which constitute, after all, the very substance of sociological knowledge’ (1981: 30). For
Bertaux, ‘social relations’ roughly equates to ‘structures of domination’, and he insists that the best way to see inside these structures is with the direct assistance of those living inside them. This call to arms reasonably summarises the thinking and method behind *Home from Home*, and its methodology. As Bertaux writes: ‘If given a chance to talk freely, people appear to know a lot about what is going on; a lot more, sometimes, than sociologists’ (1981: 38). Or, as one of Bertaux’s collaborators puts it: ‘When people tell their life stories, culture speaks through their mouths’ (Bertaux-Wiame 1981: 259).

Immigrants are in some ways the quintessential tools for a life-story approach to social questions, falling as they do into Plummer’s category of ‘Strangers/Outsiders/ Marginal People’ (2001: 134), rather romantically seen as the sorts of people whose fate reveals most about the underlying nature of a society. The Stranger is ‘a person who may be in society but not of it’ with a life lived ‘at a cultural crossroads’ (ibid.). So, for example, when Onyejelem interviewed Sahr Yambusu from Sierra Leone, the middle-aged subject highlighted his own rather dramatic shift in status upon migration, which enabled him to view Irish society in a way that was impossible for a native Irish person, a way in which he could never have seen his home society, where his ‘place’ was stable.

*Home from Home*’s editing strategy - its intention to break apart individual stories and interweave different voices around particular themes - is both a means of throwing light on the cultural order and of avoiding what Franco Ferrarotti calls ‘the literary danger inherent’ in autobiographical narrative and the tendency ‘to interpret the specific biography as an absolute and irreducible destiny’ (1981: 19). In his own work in rural southern Italy, he writes, ‘I was very careful to try to connect individual biographies to the global characteristics of a precisely dated, experienced historical situation’ (ibid.). For Ferrarotti the notion of saying anything coherent and meaningful about an individual is too complicated for a mere sociologist: ‘the individual is not the founder of
the social, but rather its sophisticated product’ (1981: 26). Why not, he asks, ‘substitute
the biography of the primary group [rather than of an individual] as the basic heuristic
unit of a renewed biographical method?’ (1981: 24). One senses in Ferrarotti that the
choice to foreground the ‘primary group’ (workplace, extended family) is something of
a methodological shot in the dark, in the absence, in either sociology or Marxist theory,

Nonetheless, Ferrarotti’s call to locate biographical method clearly in the dialectic bet-
 tween individuals and social systems offers useful guidance even to research-driven
journalism. The same goes for his important observations on the dialectics of
interviewing:

The observer is radically implicated in his research ... [the interviewee] far from
being passive, constantly modifies his behaviour according to the behaviour of the
observer. The circular feedback process renders any presumption of objective
knowledge simply ridiculous. [Instead, any knowledge gained will be] mutually
shared knowledge rooted in the intersubjectivity of the interaction ... The price to
be paid by the observer... will be to be reciprocally known just as thoroughly ...
Knowledge thus becomes what sociological methodology has always wished to

It is within an acknowledged realm of risk, then, that we should ask ourselves the sort
of questions posed by Tagg: ‘To what extent should the interviewer explore the details
of particular remembered events? Should the interviewer differentiate the typical from
the exceptional, and how should the interviewer encourage elaboration?’ (1985: 168).
Ferrarotti’s formula suggests that there cannot possibly be any ‘correct’ answer to
these questions in the context of a given ‘circular feedback process’ (1981: 20),
though they must surely also be revisited in the course of transcribing, compiling and
editing the work – bearing in mind too that ‘all actors are incompletely conscious of
the conditions, meanings and outcomes of their actions’ (Chamberlayne et al 2000: 9).
Conclusion

Even once we accept, for the sake of argument, that we can gain some socially useful knowledge from a life-story project such as *Home from Home*, some questions remain, enunciated by other life-story researchers: ‘It is precisely its possibilities for bringing private understanding and emotions about the private and the public into the public arena as textual narratives that raise ethical questions about the use of autobiography for the researcher’ (Harrison & Lyon 1993: 103). For most journalists who work in the ‘social affairs’ realm, necessitating intimate discussion with ‘ordinary people’, these questions – essentially about the ‘use’ of people’s lives – have to be pushed aside, for the greater good either of the journalistic enterprise or of some larger cause that is served by the telling of a private story. While the authors of the above insist that ‘contexts such as political intentions’ do not ‘necessarily invalidate autobiography as a research resource or topic’ (ibid.), their warning puts such rationalisations in an important ethical context.

Nonetheless, and with all cautions duly noted, the *Home from Home* project fits within the most optimistic and engaged view of the capacity of the biographical method as a means of challenging elite notions of social organisation, and the discriminatory practices and discourses that often flow from these. Indeed, in as much as it must be ‘about the New Ireland’, it may serve to define that Ireland as comprising precisely those notions, practices and discourses. Biography, in this view, is ‘an alternative narrative ... a means to challenge a system which substitutes efficiency for sociability, economy for need, and public panic for individual experience’ (Chamberlayne et al. 2000: 29). The words are particular apt in relation to the potential role of life stories in the arguments, in Ireland and elsewhere, about immigration.
Notes

1 A tabloid newspaper founded in 2000 and, at the time of writing, the only self-consciously ‘multicultural’ periodical in Ireland.
3 The nearest, partial analogue is Susan Knight’s (2001) book of interviews with female immigrants.
4 See Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (2005) _Failte FM_.
5 See Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (2005) _Globa194.9 FM_ The practice of establishing radio stations for ethnic/multicultural audiences is not new in Europe. Radio Multikulti came on the air in Berlin in September 1994: ‘Broadcast media in Berlin have recently been the focus of considerable public attention concerning potential trajectories for the future of the city’s ethnic diversity’ (Vertovec 2000: 14).
7 Quote based on Browne’s near-contemporaneous notes of the broadcast.
8 Irish defamation laws mean that calling someone a racist, even in the midst of spirited argument, is a risky business in broadcasting.
9 A talk given on the occasion of the Africa Solidarity Centre Annual Public Lecture, titled ‘Imaging and Representing Africa in the Western Media’ (2004).
10 Quote based on near-contemporaneous notes.
11 Certain low-rent commercial streets of Dublin’s north inner-city have filled with immigrant businesses, most notably Moore Street, where cheap short leases have been available due to uncertainties about large-scale redevelopment.

Bibliography


Appendix

Declarations by co-authors

27 September 2016,

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Coulter, C., H. Browne, R. Flynn, V. Hetherington, G. Titley (2016) "These people protesting might not be so student if their own jobs were on the line": Representations of the economic consequences of opposition to the Iraq war in the Irish national press. Media War and Conflict 9: 113-136.

Harry Browne was, with Colin Coulter, one of the main authors on the research relating to the above-named article. He was centrally involved at every stage in conceiving, organising, drafting and revising the work.

Yours Sincerely,

Colin Coulter

Dr Colin Coulter
Roddy Flynn  
School of Communications  
Dublin City University  

4 October 2016

To whom it concerns,

With regard to the following article:

"These people protesting might not be so strident if their own jobs were on the line": Representations of the economic consequences of opposition to the Iraq war in the Irish national press. Media War and Conflict 9: 113-136.

I am happy to confirm that Harry Browne was, with Colin Coulter, one of the main authors on the research relating to the above-named article. He was centrally involved at every stage in conceiving, organising, drafting and revising the work.

Please feel free to contact me at 01-700 8355 if you require any further clarification in this regard.

Yours sincerely

Dr Roddy Flynn

To Whom it May Concern

Harry Browne was, with Colin Coulter, one of the main authors on the research relating to the above-named article. He was centrally involved at every stage in conceiving, organising, drafting and revising the work.

Yours faithfully

[Signature]

Vanessa Hetherington
28 September 2016

To whom it may concern,

RE: Coulter, C., H. Browne, R. Flynn, V. Hetherington, G. Titley (2016) "These people protesting might not be so strident if their own jobs were on the line": Representations of the economic consequences of opposition to the Iraq war in the Irish national press. *Media War and Conflict* 9: 113-136.

Harry Browne was, with Colin Coulter, one of the main authors on the research relating to the above-named article. He was centrally involved at every stage in conceiving, organising, drafting and revising the work.

Yours truly,

[Signature]

Dr. Davan Titley
To whom it may concern:


Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on my mobile +353 86 852 3397.

Yours sincerely,

Chinedu Onyejelem