

# Irish Newsprint Media Representations of Immigration and Emigration in the Aftermath of the Economic Crisis: A Focus on the Year 2012.

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## Abstract

The subject of migration is topical and even more so in the midst of an economic crisis. Migrants are regularly perceived merely in economic terms, i.e. how they can benefit the economy (by providing required labour services) or how they can damage it (by requiring aid/housing). While immigration was actively encouraged during the period of economic prosperity in Ireland, in recent years there has been a refocus on the impact of immigration on employment availability and wage levels. In relation to emigration, Ireland has a long and ongoing history of this practice. Usually, emigration is framed as either an adventure or a tragedy. Although many people emigrated during the “boom-times” for various reasons, in the context of the recession, there is much concern over the “forced” emigration of people to seek employment. Based within this broad context, this paper examines how migration is represented in the Irish newsprint media. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, it offers a detailed deconstruction of discourses of migration in the aftermath of the economic crisis, in particular during 2012. Overall, this paper finds that both immigration and emigration are referred to at similar levels. Immigration is discussed in relation to the number of immigrants and the findings of the 2011 census, and a number of articles concentrate on how immigrants can benefit the economy. Articles that concentrate on emigration debate “The Gathering” and much concern is expressed over the need for people to emigrate due to the economic downturn.

Keywords: Ireland, Immigration, Emigration, Economic Crisis, Newsprint Media, Critical Discourse Analysis, Representations.

## 1. Introduction

Migrants are continually represented in various manners by numerous sources. A common area of concern is the perceived impact migrants have on the economy, in either positive ways (through labour requirements) or in negative ways (in relation to welfare dependency [4, 5] or the impact on wage levels [1, 3]). The economic utility of migration comes especially into focus during a time of economic crisis.

During Ireland’s economic boom (circa 1994-2007) immigration (mainly EU migration) was actively encouraged by the then Irish Government [18]. Indeed, significant numbers of migrants arrived in Ireland in recent years, particularly from 2004 onwards [9, 16]. European immigration was viewed as a source of low-cost labour [8]. Yet, with the present economic crisis and the increase in unemployment levels, there has been a refocus on the impact of immigration on employment availability and wage levels [2]. Therefore, moving from a time-period of prosperity to recession, the role of immigration in Ireland seems to have morphed from one of a necessity and benefit to a liability.

The emigration of people from the country has also gained significant attention since the economic crisis began and the subsequent rise in unemployment levels. Ireland has a long history of emigration [6] and it is usually framed along

the spectrum of “adventure” or “tragedy”. Although many people emigrated from the State during the time of prosperity for a variety of complex reasons, in the context of the recession, there is much concern over the “forced” emigration of people to seek employment. Significant attention has been placed on the levels of young people emigrating, especially the number of young men, due to the economic downturn.

The manner in which migration is perceived by key individuals and institutions within Irish society reveals more about those producing such representations than migrants themselves. Indeed, the Irish newsprint media is a key source that disseminates legitimized “dominant” discourses about migration into society on a daily basis [21, 22]. Deconstructing institutional discourses can uncover materializations of certain ideologies and taken-for-granted ways of thinking about key issues. This paper undertakes a Critical Discourse Analysis approach [23] in deconstructing discourses of migration from the Irish newsprint media. This research focuses on the seminal time-period of the current economic crisis and specifically examines the year 2012. It is acknowledged here that the time-period under analysis can be extended. Indeed, this research forms the basis of a growing project that will extend the period under analysis and undertake a comparative analysis with a time-period from the

“Celtic Tiger” era. The overall aim of this paper is to reveal how both immigration and emigration are represented by the Irish newsprint media within the current economic “crisis” time-period.

## 2. Newsprint Media Data

### 2.1 The Number of Articles

Through the resource *LexisNexis* all articles published in relation to migration in the Irish newsprint media were sought and identified. This revealed a total of 102 articles for the year 2012 from both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. As can be seen in Figure 1, a total of five newspapers cover this topic. The *Irish Times* accounts for a substantial proportion of articles, totalling 49% of the data. The remainder of sources cover the topic to a lesser extent: the *Irish Independent and Sunday Independent* (15%), the *Mirror and Sunday Mirror* (15%), and the *Irish Examiner* (12%). The *Irish Daily Mail* has the least coverage of the topic of migration (9%).

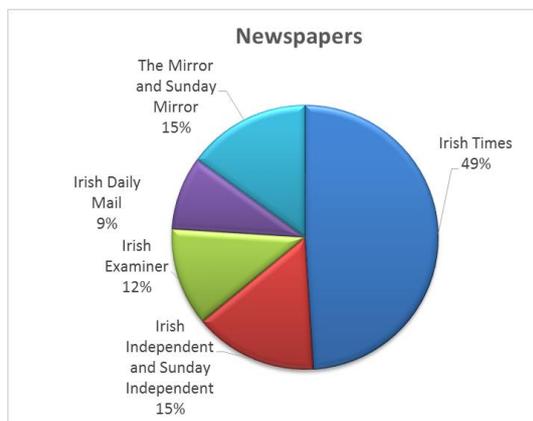


Fig 1: The Number of Newspaper Articles

### 2.2 The Occurrence of Articles over Time

Figure 2 displays the number of newspaper articles published about migration in the twelve months of 2012. It is evident that the topics of immigration and emigration are both consistently covered by the Irish newsprint media over the year. However, the levels of reporting fluctuates. A significant number of articles were published in March (14), which is a time when the festival of St. Patrick’s Day brings the topic migration and the Diaspora into focus. June is also a time where high levels of reporting are evident (16). Upon examination of these articles from June there seems to be no particular issue that is in focus here and many differing migration-related topics are discussed. In August, there are very few articles (2), however, August is generally a time of minimal reporting on most issues (not just migration). September sees a return to a high level of reporting (14) and there is a particular focus on emigration at this time. Overall, this data shows how migration is an issue that merits consistent reporting by the Irish newsprint media during 2012.

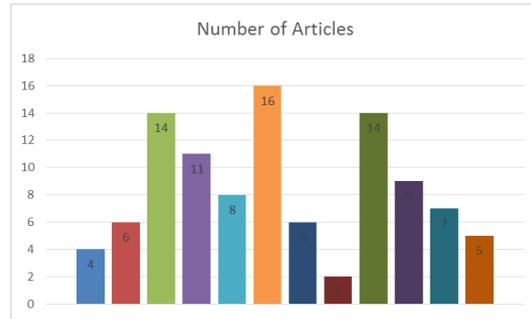


Fig 2: The Number of Articles over Time

### 2.3 The Focus of the Articles

It is important to identify the geographical areas that the articles refer to, as it is a way of identifying key areas of concern. Upon examination, it is evident that the majority of articles concentrate upon the Irish context (60%), which is to be expected (see Figure 3 below). Nevertheless, other geographical areas are given attention, including Europe (13%), the UK (9%), Australia (9%), and Canada (6%).

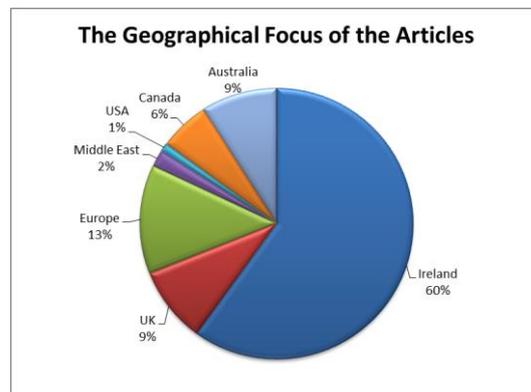


Fig 3: The Geographical Focus of the Articles

There is a further distinction that can be made in relation to this data. This research found that the articles which relate to the Irish context discuss both immigration and emigration to a relatively even level, with a slightly increased focus on emigration (immigration 46%, emigration 51%, both topics 3%). The same can be said about the articles that concentrate on the UK context, which examine both immigration and emigration to an even level. Articles that relate to Europe only discuss immigration, while articles that relate to Australia and Canada concentrate upon emigration.

Having established that there are distinct geographical focuses to the discourses, it is important to deconstruct fully what issues are being discussed in relation to immigration and emigration in the Irish newsprint media. The following sections discuss the various “discourses of immigration” and “discourses of emigration” in detail.

### 3. Discourses of Immigration

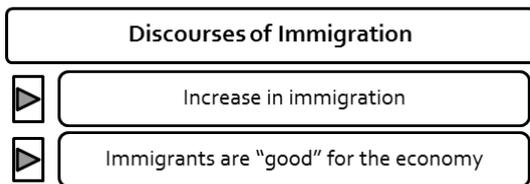


Fig 4: Discourses of Immigration

The Irish newsprint media relay two distinct "discourses of immigration" in 2012. The first discourse discusses the increase in immigration to Ireland in recent years, relaying statistics on the number of immigrants currently in Ireland. During this time, initial findings from the 2011 census are being released, therefore much of this statistical information is based on this research. Within the context of the economic downturn and a common rhetoric that many immigrants have now "gone home", the newsprint media find it remarkable that the population of immigrants in Ireland remains substantial:

*"Despite the State's changed economic fortunes since that census [2006], there were 544,357 non-Irish nationals living here on the latest census night" [7].*

There is a distinct recognition that even though Ireland is still going through an economic crisis, it remains beneficial for immigrants (especially those from Eastern Europe) to migrate to the country:

*"Large numbers grasped the opportunity with both hands, and Ireland's depression has not discouraged our cousins east of the Oder from seeking their fortunes here" [19].*

The second "discourse of immigration" discusses how immigrants are "good" for the economy. This type of positive discourse might be expected during a time of economic prosperity, therefore it is surprising that within the context of a substantial economic crisis in Ireland, immigrants are seen to benefit the economy:

*"Immigrants play vital economic role, even in slump" [13].*

Furthermore, immigrants (particularly skilled migrants) are seen to be a vital entity in order for the economy to begin to recover:

*"Many countries, including Ireland, continue to require overseas workers to fill specific skills gaps, but an increasingly bureaucratic immigration system can be seen to impede this and deter investment" [11].*

On the whole, these types of discourses are to be welcomed as they do not scapegoat immigrants and construct them as a problem. However, it is notable how the immigration system is represented as something that should accommodate (certain types of) immigrants when there is a requirement for skilled labour positions and capital investment. Furthermore, through this discourse immigrants are merely seen in economic terms. It is argued here that there

needs to be a move away from this type of one dimensional attitude towards migrants, merely viewing them as an entity that can benefit "us" or the Irish State. Under this rationale it is relatively easy to justifiably exclude migrants from society if they do not fulfil certain self-serving purposes.

### 4. Discourses of Emigration

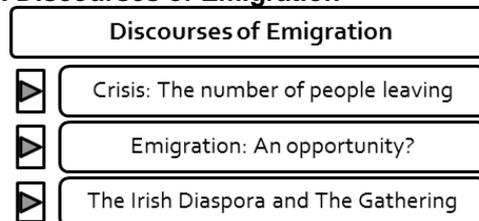


Fig 5: Discourses of Emigration

There are three "discourses of emigration" in the Irish newsprint media in 2012. The first directly relates to the economic crisis and is quite clear in its argumentation. The emigration of young people leaving the country due to a lack of employment is represented as a crisis:

*"There is said to be a need for immediate and stronger Government action to stem the flow of young people leaving the country" [15].*

Although many young people are emigrating at this time, this discourse does not acknowledge that people also emigrated during the "boom-times". Furthermore, the message that young people are "forced" to emigrate for employment is limited, as it fails to recognise that people emigrate for various complex reasons. It is notable however that this concern is most especially expressed in relation to young men. There is a real concentration on how young men are leaving and the negative impact this has on both the community and the family [12]. Within the context of this particular discourse there is also a focus on those that recently travelled to Australia. Disappointment is expressed as Irish emigrants are "letting [the] nation down" [20]. They are said to be involved in a range of antisocial behaviour from credit card fraud to drunk-and-disorderly.

The second "discourse of emigration" encompasses a debate over the description of emigration as an opportunity (rather than an imposed necessity). This debate began with comments from Minister Michael Noonan, who, in order to deflect Governmental responsibility for high unemployment rates, stated that emigration is a lifestyle choice. There was much criticism of the Minister's comments:

*"For the vast majority of emigrants...the decision to seek work abroad has been a matter of dire necessity. Their departure represents the most serious brain drain this country has experienced since Famine times. The Minister is keen to put the best face on Ireland's current difficulties" [10].*

Following on from this the *Irish Times* published the findings of a survey, which found that:

“...many have been forced to leave, but it also showed more left in search of a better lifestyle and greater opportunities abroad” [17].

Emigration continues to be rigidly constructed between the binaries of “adventure” and “tragedy”.

The third “discourse of emigration” focuses upon the Irish Diaspora and “The Gathering” (a series of events established for 2013 with the aim of attracting those with links to Ireland and therefore generating tourism revenue). In the build up to “The Gathering” there was much discussion of this event in the Irish newsprint media. A quite positive discourse surrounded it until late 2012 when the actor and former Irish Cultural Ambassador Gabriel Byrne criticised the event. Many were surprised by the actor’s comments, who referred to it as a “sham”. He maintained that the Government was using the Diaspora as purely a financial source, yet generally ignored them and the current generation of Irish emigrants [14]. Nonetheless, the media remained mainly positive about “The Gathering”:

“...it is not just about inviting people to come here, enjoy themselves and spend money. It is about creating a sense of community engagement in Ireland’s economic recovery” [14].

## 5. Conclusion

A number of specific discourses of migration dominate the Irish newsprint media in 2012. This paper has outlined the recent context of migration in Ireland and the various discourses that are evident during this distinct period of the economic crisis. “Discourses of immigration” take note of the number of immigrants, but this concentration on immigration numbers is probably exacerbated by data gathered in the 2011 census. Immigrants are also seen to be a requirement in Ireland’s ongoing economic recovery and anti-immigrant discourses are significantly lacking. “Discourses of emigration” frame the emigration of young people, and especially young men, as a crisis. There is also much debate over whether emigration is a tragedy or an opportunity. Finally, the Diaspora-tourist (like the skilled “economic” immigrant) is represented as a source of income and a way to aid the ongoing economic crisis.

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