

Paper from the Conference “INTER: A European Cultural Studies Conference in Sweden”, organised by the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden (ACSIS) in Norrköping 11-13 June 2007. Conference Proceedings published by Linköping University Electronic Press at www.ep.liu.se/ecp/025/. © The Author.

Who is European: A Case Study of The Irish Face in America

Gail Baylis

School of Media, Film & Journalism, University of Ulster, N. Ireland

g.baylis@ulster.ac.uk

This paper focuses on the transnationality of identity in terms of how Irish diasporic memory is functioning in a post-September 11th context. Here a distinction is made between Irish identity in Ireland and Irish-American identity. Drawing on current cultural studies' critiques, a further distinction is made; namely how the 'look' of Irishness is functioning as a sign for 'white' America (Negra: 2006).

In this respect, *The Irish Face In America* is an interesting text in that it exploits both the conventions of 'old' and 'new' photography. This study draws out the significance of these strategies in terms of constructions of Irish-American diasporic cultural memory as it is being currently formulated in a specific location; namely, a post 9/11 US context. Transnationality, in this instance works in two directions because a post-Cease-Fire Irish context is necessary for this re-imagining of the Irish terrorist. Through this case study of *The Irish Face In America*, I argue that photography is being employed to reify notions of roots and identity (Ireland and the Irish) that serve to obfuscate the challenges of multiculturalism in contemporary North America. European identification is, thus, refashioned to appease anxieties about authenticity and memory, and to articulate concerns about migration and integration.

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Ethnicity, like many other aspects of cultural life, has become less 'rooted' in notions of Essence as it has become more commodified as a label to be a-fixed or negotiated in a global economy of throw-away signs.¹ Pierre Nora has noted how the concepts of memory and identity have undergone a radical "reversal of meaning" wherein what once referenced the individual now takes on the currency of the collectivity; the net outcome being "a way of defining *from without*" (2002, 6). The fashionable status that Irishness has acquired exemplifies this process of branding ethnicity as collective identity and cultural memory. The upsurge in Irish heritage culture has received considerable critical attention, with amongst others, Diana Negra defining Ireland as now serving as a "therapeutic heritage zone" for the US (2006, 358) while Roy Foster refers to the effects within Ireland as producing theme-park Ireland (2002, 23-36). The popularity for all things Irish precedes the attack on The World Trade Centre (September 11, 2001), and that legacy is acknowledged in this critique. Having said this, the focus of this inquiry will be a critical investigation of how the sign of Irish-American identity, and particularly photography's role in producing this, is functioning in a post 9/11 context in the US. The analysis that follows indicates that without this acknowledgement (how 9/11 is being memorialised) we fail to appreciate the utility value of current constructions of Irish-Americanism in a culture of remembering.

The speed with which images of the destruction of the Twin Towers circulated meant that the event took on a near-immediate global visibility. However, in terms of making sense of the meaning of 9/11 as 'national' catastrophe it may not be the immediate but the retrospective image that carries more weight. Susan Sontag claims that: "In an era of information overload, the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it" (2004, 19). Certainly, Joel Meyerowitz's monumental work *Aftermath* (an archive, a touring exhibition backed by the US State Department and a photo-text) memorialises the meaning of 9/11 as a heroic tale of endurance, recovery and redemption.² Likewise, *Here Is New York* (an exhibition, online site and photo-text) makes clear that its reference point is the destruction of the city and the human dimension in this.³ What is notable in these two, in some respects very different forms of photographic practice (the majority of those who contributed to "Here Is New York" were amateur photographers and none had the unprecedented access to Ground Zero that Meyerowitz did), is how both ventures imply that photography is democratic. Such an equation with the medium may not be inconsequential in a context of the destabilisation of democratic 'rightness' caused by the attack on the Twin Towers.

Marianne Hirsch notes how: "photography has emerged as the most evocative medium in our attempt to deal with the aftermath of September 11" (2002, 2). In this respect, photographs are central to the construction of 9/11 as cultural memory. But it is not only in the use of photographs that directly reference the aftermath of the destruction of the Twin Towers that negotiations are at play to invoke a collective cultural memory. For this, we also have to look at sites of popular culture and how photography is being employed to re-configure Americanism. One such text that illustrates these negotiations is the focus of this study – *The Irish Face In America* (2004). Of course, as Benedict Anderson (1983) reveals, all constructions of the nation are based on "imagined communities": such imagining is

1 See (Trifonas 2001) for a reading of Roland Barthes' *The Empire of Signs*. While Barthes draws on his experiences of disorientation in contemporary Japanese culture in this work, his arguments are applicable to late-Capitalist culture in general.

2 For the marketing of the work as such see (Kennedy 2003, pp315-326)

3 In terms of content, *Here Is New York* is surprisingly conventional, rarely departing from the familiar tropes of photojournalism to register catastrophe. Hirsch comments on this, noting that the photographs 'fit into well-known genres and evoke familiar tropes and symbolic motifs' (2002, 4).

concurrent on media representation. The Irish nation imagined in nineteenth-century Irish nationalism (within and outside Ireland) was, in the first instance, based on a sense of "lost unity", which gave rise "to an aesthetics of fragmentation, with debility and loss being positively valued" (Lloyd 2003, 160, 198). Diasporic consciousness, in this context, appears to be foundational for the Irish State to emerge. Where it will fracture in terms of Irish-American identity is in the interplay with another foundational nation myth (America).

Popular Culture: Negotiating Stereotypes

The Irish Face In America is a large-format, glossy photo-text, first published in the US in 2004. The inside leaf to the dust jacket informs us that there are "100 four-colour photographs", all of which are portraits. Accompanying each of the portraits is a narrative by the subject wherein they define their sense of Irish-Americanism. In some instances, the portraits are overlaid with quotes from these definitions. The portraits are further organised by the ordering of the book into four sections, each with an introductory essay by a well-known, successful Irish- American figure. In addition to this, the 'Introduction' is written by Pete Hamill (an Irish-American novelist and journalist) and the 'Afterword' by the author (herself an Irish-American writer on international business and culture) and the photographer, who though not clearly defined in terms of an Irish ancestry is supported by reference to his having taken many images of Irish scenery and as having an Irish-American wife. In short, anchorage is significant in establishing a preferred reading for how these photographs communicate: this is achieved on a number of levels - by the overlay of text on some of the portraits; by the accompanying subject narratives; by the section headings and section essay; and by the meta-frame of title, 'Introduction', 'Afterword' and sponsors (who include Kodak, Guinness, Irish Radio and numerous Irish-American organisations in the US). In all aspects, it becomes apparent; the text references its Irish-American credentials.

The Irish Face In America, as the title indicates, sets out to recognise the transnationality of identity as a current condition. Given its post 9/11 publication date its construction of ethnicity in relation to the US cannot escape some sort of acknowledgement of a collective memorising of that event, even though the photographs employed do not in overt ways recall that event. In this context, stereotypes of the Irish have little to do with Ireland but everything to do with assimilation narratives of the Irish-American. The issue, then, is not an assessment of how realistic or otherwise these representations are but to consider how stereotypes are being employed as transnational signifiers. We are presented with numerous tropes of the Irish stereotype: red hair, Aran jumpers, Irish Colleens, the Irish-American family, and so on. The cover-image condenses all of these ethnic registers into a single image of a freckled, fair-skinned, red headed, smiling young girl with hands on hips (who happens to be the author's daughter), dressed in a cotton sleeveless dress with applied fabric flower set against a slightly out-of-focus backdrop of rhododendron bushes. The fixing of the meaning of this image is furthered by the anchorage of the title of the text, which is superimposed on the girl's torso. By such means an essentialised look serves to construct Irish-Americanism as a sign of innocence and naturalness.⁴ Such stereotyping, while having scant relevance to post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, is highly conducive to the needs of white America's self-definition, which, in a post-9/11 context, is preoccupied with both revisiting assimilation narratives and asserting a recovery myth as a return to innocence.⁵

The cover image offers a good illustration of the overall semiotic register of this text as a whole. The text's relation to post 9/11 discourses, however, well repays further investigation.

4 The bodily stance (female hands on hips) is reminiscent of countless historical representations of the Irish Colleen. The posture serves to indicate Irish femininity as natural, rural and foremost, innocent. For an account of a photographic precursor and its continuing circulation (see Baylis 2007, 29-30).

5 See (Negra 2006, 354-371) for an account of this occurring in a range of other popular sites.

In terms of its use of the photograph, *The Irish Face In America* is an interesting text in that it employs some of the earliest conventions of photographic portraiture and also the stylistics of current imaging technologies. In the following sections attention will focus on the effects of this use of photography and how it works to support a narrativisation of the past that specifically references the context of post 9/11 US. In this context, looking back is for the present.

Physiognomic Registers and Familial Stories: Diasporic Postmodernity

Physiognomy, the Victorian pseudo-science of facial features, served to render 'normative' categorization systems. That it was deeply embroiled in the production of racial ideologies is indicated both by the stereotype of the Irish as inferior race in British imperial rhetoric (Curtis Jr. second ed.1997) and in early representations of the history of the Irish in America (Ignatiev 1995). The 'whitening' of the Irish as outlined by Ignatiev (1995) involved a shift in representational signs. Physiognomy, then, might appear an unlikely discourse to employ in a text that focuses on the Irish-American but its utility value is clearly indicated in a number of ways: by the title of the text, the way the photograph is constructed (of which, I will elaborate on later) and by the emphasis given to it by Hamill in his introductory essay to the work. Significant here is both his recourse to physiognomic analogy and the near identical phrasing he uses to invoke this (both at the beginning and close of the 'Introduction'). This physiognomic summation is also quoted on the back dust jacket.

Of one thing I'm certain: there is no such thing as an Irish face, yet I know one when I see one ... Their faces tell us, in some mysterious way, that they are all part of the same tribe ellipsis. The Irish in America, like the Irish in Ireland, have paid all the dues necessary for such knowledge [*overcoming adversity*]. There is no such thing as an Irish face, but I know one when I see one. (Mc Namara and Smith: 2004, 7, 9)

The contradiction inherent in Hamill's characterisation is, I would argue, essential for this text to operate in the context of white identity politics in the US post 9/11. The fact that the assertion that "there is no such thing as an Irish face" and "I know one when I see one" is repeated points to its oxymoronic value.

There are two interpellations at work here: firstly, the promotion of the idea of Irish-American identity as a distinct ethnicity and secondly, and at the same time, the placement of the text as open to adoption for 'white' America. This entails drawing on ethnic stereotypes (the text, as noted, abounds with the exploitation of such physiognomic registers) but also, employing strategies that are not limited to this; not all the people photographed look stereotypically Irish. There are a few portraits that register physiognomic hybridity, but these are rare: the overarching 'look' of the text is a signifier of 'whiteness'. In this way, the text can nominally appeal to multiculturalism while offering access to a white assimilation myth. The choice of portraits in *The Irish Face In America* thus serves to be fluid enough to both construct ethnicity and mark that as an open white attribute.

And here there are certain affinities with the in-vogue notion of deterritorialization. Hamill's conflation of notions of diaspora/tribe indicates the bricolage that the text attempts to produce in its rendering of diasporic status as a fashion identity accessory. James Clifford notes how this sort of appropriation has become pervasive.

Tribal cultures are not diasporic; their sense of rootedness in the land is precisely what diasporic peoples have lost. And yet, as we have seen, the tribal-diasporic opposition is not absolute. ...In the late 20th century, all or most communities have diasporic dimensions (moments, tactics, practices, articulations). ... it is possible to perceive a loosely coherent,

adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement. The currency of these responses is inescapable. (1994, 310)

Diasporic status can now easily slide into an equation with the postmodern citizen where its source need no longer reside in a distinct geographical a priori but in a tenet of sensibility. Arguably, what is witnessed in current post 9/11 reconfigurations of the notion of white America (that that previously did not need to define itself) is the sense of "dwelling in displacement". This sense of decentredness may, in part, explain the continuing popularity for all things Irish.

But, there is something else going on here too; diasporic status has acquired *savoir-faire*. The claiming of diasporic identity has come to override the classic American immigrant narrative in which "the canonical three generations struggled through a hard transition to ethnic American status" (Clifford 1994, 311).⁶ The label Irish-American insists on dual ethnic identification rather than the transfer from one to the other (as in the classic American immigration narrative). Claims to diasporic identity, thus can chime well with a culture of postmodernism: "because the signifier *diasporic* denotes a predicament of multiple locations, it slips easily into theoretical discourses informed by poststructuralism and notions of the multiply-positioned subject" (Clifford 1994, 319). Diasporic identification has come to serve as a metaphor for the "modern, transnational, intercultural" cosmopolitan, postmodern subject (Clifford 1994, 319). In this climate identification with Irishness need not be based solely on strong genealogical ties but can be an adoptive preference based on ethnic cache.

In drawing on the conventions of the family album, *The Irish Face In America* both affords space for the consumerist postmodern fluid subject who adopts varying identity positions and at the same time emphasises genealogical analogues as a support for its reading of ethnicity (the family album is the picture-book of the family's history). In this way it allows access to those both with and without direct connections to Irish ancestry by its reference to the family as a universalised concept. This humanistic idea figuratively affords consoling genealogical access. That we are intended to read the text in terms of the family album is indicated in a number of ways: by the choice to adopt of the portrait format, through the stress placed on the importance of family as an ethical-ethnic quality (Irish) and in the overall format of the text. Cumulatively, the portraits serve to evoke the family album by appearing in book form rather than in electronic format. The visual and tactile quality of this text (its use of the portrait format and size) mimics the Victorian family album, which itself was based on the format of the family Bible, of which it offered a secular variant as a way of telling stories that construct a history of lineage.

What is of note in this type of adaptation is the "strikingly anodyne nature" of the way that Ireland is conceptualised, which allows Irish connections to serve as a "consoling ethnic category" and "a way of speaking a whiteness that would otherwise be taboo" (Negra 2006, 355). The family constructed in *The Irish Face In America* is highly conservative, selective and clearly white (the large, close-knit supportive unit that serves as bedrock for communal values).⁷ The family portraits in this text exploit a number of tropes, of which the most notable are the emphasis on largesse and closeness. For example: Peter Casey appears with his family (five children and his wife) spaced along an impressive neo-classical staircase in a

6 Clifford in his account of diasporas, and revealingly in his only reference to the Irish, recognises that immigrants from Ireland and central, southern, and eastern Europe were racialised but he also notes how 'European immigrants have, with time, come to participate as ethnic "whites" in multicultural America. The same cannot be said, overall, of populations of colour ...' (1994, n8, 329). What is of note in this assimilation myth is how it privileged the immigrant of 'white' European stock. The history of Irish assimilation in America avers with Clifford's reading.

7 This is implicit through textual anchorage (the accompanying narrative by the subject) even in portraits of individuals.

clearly opulent house. The portrait is backlit to emphasise the light and openness of the space, as home (this image would not be out of place in an interior home magazine). Overlaid on this portrait is a quote from Casey that states: "Being Irish is an invaluable asset in this country"; presumably this is meant to account for his success and the smiling faces of all the family members (McNamara and Smith 2004, 177). Caroline Sweeney's narrative is accompanied by a family portrait, which is headed by the text: "My husband is the seventh son, and we have seven sons" ((McNamara and Smith 2004, 209). The construction of the photograph promotes the idea that the Irish family adheres to traditional values and that it is in essence, natural. This stereotype is spatially asserted in the photograph by the symmetrical arrangement of the subjects; this serves to produce an interlocking unit (the grandparents and grandchild being positioned as the central nexus) – all smile directly to camera, indicating the conventions of the formal family portrait.

As a 'coffee-table' book, *The Irish Face In America* is, as with the family album, associable with the domestic sphere. The construction of the family, which the family album both represents and endorses, is based on the myth that it provides a space outside the political. However as Judith Williamson outlines, the formal family portrait (taken by a professional photographer) is always intended to serve as a record of the family's respectability; in this, its remit extends the private (1984, 19-22), as is evinced by these public photographs in *The Irish Face In America*. As with the process of constructing the family album, these portraits are highly coded and serve a selective purpose in producing a limited narrative of family, history and ethnic roots. The effects are to "distinctly fetishizes heritage physiognomy" and to imply a "'democratic' Irishness": the latter achieved through the "mixing of its profiles of celebrities with profiles of 'regular' people throughout" (Negra 2006, 17, n.10). By drawing on the conventions of the family album the text can both expound traditional family values and obfuscate the political dimension in its reading of ethnicity. The means by which a discourse of "'democratic' Irishness" is achieved in the photograph is through a process of isolating. These photographs are of individuals, the pair or the selected family unit. While the text can thus appear to be expansive in the number of photographs included, and in the choice to represent people from diverse occupational fields, age ranges and from across the US, there is little sense of registering multiculturalism outside the Irish signifier.

What is also of note is how social attributes are rendered within a physiognomic schematisation to function as ethnicised traits of ethical and moral stature. In this, the text is thoroughly conventional in its drawing on Irish stereotypes such as the presumption that the Irish have an innate proclivity for self-expression, which is exhibited through a love of dance, music, storytelling and sociability. These are the clichés of tourist iconography. Among those profiled are: Michael Flatley (creator of Riverdance), traditional Irish dancers, numerous musicians, actors, writers, and poets. Jim Flannery, a Yeats' scholar and tenor informs us: "In the bardic tradition, the Irish have always been artists and scholars – complete people" (McNamara and Smith 2004, 128). Flannery is located in a setting (presumably his study) that serves to endorse his cultural capital.⁸ He is surrounded by scholarly works, art objects and is posed seated with arm resting on an open piano. Peter Quinn and Tom Quin (both in the literary profession) declare: "The essence of being Irish is the stories you absorb as a child, the ceaseless stream of words flowing through your brain from the first moment of unconscious perception, words sung, spoken, strung together in poems, speeches, prayers, games, and curses" (McNamara and Smith 2004, 53). Such rhetorical essentialising fits well the stereotype of the Irishman as having the 'gift of the gab'. The Quins, dressed in smart-

8 Bourdieu (1986) in *Distinctions: A social critique of the judgement of taste* analyses how cultural capital operates.

casuals, are posed father hand on son's shoulder in an outdoor autumnal location: the image would not be out of place in current tourist literature promoting Ireland.

Co-existing with this construction of the Irish-American as 'Celtic' is a constant emphasis on Irish-American success as stemming from hard work, motivation, a highly developed sense of equality, and a strong commitment to family and community. Such ethnicisation is given further ethical resonances by the section divisions of the text. The four sections are: 'Culture And Entertainment' with an introductory essay by Patricia Harty (editor of *Irish America Magazine*) entitled "The Irish Influence on Music, Culture, and Literature in America"; "Public Service" (essay: "The Aspiration to Serve: Irish Americans in Public Service" by Terry Golway, a journalist and writer); "Success" with the introductory essay "Succeeding through Hard Work and Education" by Don Keough, former President of Coca Cola; and "Generations" for which the introductory essay "The Everlasting Importance of Family" is co-authored by Mary Higgins Clark and Carol Higgins Clark, mother and daughter, and both novelists.

Genealogy, here, is attributed ethical and moral dimensions through recourse to traits that clearly echo the promise of the American Dream. Irish-American achievement is thus rendered the outcome of intuitive qualities and communal openness that is fostered by the 'American way'. As with the genealogical industry in general, *The Irish Face In America* works "to define a specific 'Irish Americanness' that negotiates social memory to produce a coherent and consoling sense of heritage" (Negra 2006, 4). However, stories of roots, the family and lineage are never solely private affairs. In "From Home to Nation", Annette Kuhn outlines how personal memory slides into collective retelling and reciprocally how notions of the nation implode on personal identity formation (1995: 2002, 147-169). *The Irish Face In America* exploits such procedures while not acknowledging them in its implicit acceptance of hegemonic Americanness as a mark of Irish-American identity.

The Irish Face in America as Photo-Memory Text

The aim of the text is to represent current Irish-American identity but to do this it bases its credentials on the past. The use of photographs in this context clearly accords with the "language of memory", which "seems to be above all a language of images" (Kuhn 2000, 188). To this end, it does not employ historical photographs (a common procedure in popular histories of the Irish in America) but, instead, adopts current media, namely digital technology. These photographic portraits are in high-saturation colour and are clearly posed and manipulated to create an aesthetisation of an ethnic 'look'. Although not taken in a studio, Smith's photographs clearly draw on the conventions of studio portraiture in terms of lighting, framing and overall composition. The stylistic choice of poses, props, dress codes and a range of location-backdrops serve to provide a 'modern' gloss to the honorific function of the studio portrait. While such deployment might suggest a move towards naturalness this is clearly modified by digital intervention.

Much has been said about the affects of New Media on memory and how new imagining culture challenges notions of authenticity (Baudrillard [1981] 2006; Nora [1984] 1989; Jameson 1991; Huyssen 1995). However, the effect is not that the new media takes over the old but the calling into play a "relationship across media" wherein "one media never simply replaces another" (Flew 2002, 2). This cross-referentiality of media forms may be particularly applicable to memory accounts, which are "always discursive, always already textual" (Kuhn 2000, 189). High-saturation colourisation is the hallmark of digital media: what it produces is a colourised memory. The outcome is not, however, one way. The "'mediation of memory' equally refers to the perception of media in terms of memory as well as to the perception of memory in terms of media" (Van Dijck 2004, 272). Recognising this is central to

understanding how photography is operating in *The Irish Face In America*. The outcome is affective; in that stylistics are working to produce modern memory culture.

However, the use of digital technology in the production of these portraits does not eradicate a faith in photographic realism. The portraits in *The Irish Face In America* while being clearly manipulated still look like photographs – we read them as being of real people. Where this impacts on memory is in a shift from a faith in indexicality as equivalent to the real to an acknowledgement that memory is constructed through media and reciprocally media is mediated by the dictates of modern memory formulations. The outcome is:

Memory, as a result, may become less a process of recalling than a topological skill, the ability to locate and identify pieces of culture that identify the place of self in relation to others. The mediation of memory, in other words, is as much a creation as it is a re-creation; in a postmodern, technological culture, memory and media are intertwined beyond distinction. (Van Dijck 2004, 272)

In terms of Irish-American diasporic memory both artifice and affectiveness suit the needs of modern memory culture in that those now claiming Irish-American identity are usually either third or fourth generation descendants of immigrants (Rains 2003, 197) or of mixed white ethnicity who choose to associate themselves with the popularity of the Irish label (Rains 2006, 155-156).

These groupings, in large measure, have no direct recall to Ireland as homeland. Ireland as a geographical lived-space, in this context, shifts to a spatialisation of Ireland as a constructed idea for those who choose to claim it as part of their identity. The outcome for current constructions of Irish-American diasporic cultural memory is that: “this negotiation, and all that it entails for the construction of Ireland within the global narrative, must also take place primarily through the production and circulation of narratives and images” (Rains 2003, 197). *The Irish Face In America* clearly partakes in the production of both. When remembering can no longer be first-hand, narratives and images come to fill those gaps for memory culture. The enthusiasm for remembering, in this context, is not personal memory but the construction of memory culture. What is sought in these instances is not actuality or the authentic *per se* but tokens to negotiate present experience in a US content. *The Irish Face In America* is particularly adept in recognising this through its use of the conventions of 'old' and 'new' photography. Artifice, in this context, speaks both of an acknowledgement of temporal dislocation and also of strategies to promote a sense of spatial integration.

Post 9/11: Remembering through the Irish Signifier

One of the outcomes of 9/11 was a registering of anxiety about the, usually taken for-granted status of whiteness, for white identity groups. The problem posed by this awareness for white identity is the very basis of its privilege: in that, “white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular”; at root its source is a void (Dyer 2002, 126). Here, Irish-American diasporic memory, through its ability to draw on a victimhood history, is particularly conducive in assuaging 'white' US's sense of trauma post 9/11. Claiming Irish connections can hold, as Negra points out, a value as a location where whiteness can be celebrated “in ways that would otherwise be problematic” (2006, 15). The ability to draw on a victim history allows Irishness to appear as both innocence and egalitarian. Its serviceableness as part of a post 9/11 American recovery myth lies in its adaptive potential for constructing collective cultural memory as a story of blameless endurance and overcoming adversity.

Recourse to history in *The Irish Face In America* illustrates such appropriation. In numerous narratives that accompany the portraits reference is made to Irish history and the early experiences of the Irish in America. Terry Golway's essay for the 'Public Service' section makes this historicizing explicit. He defines Irish-American ethnicity as deriving from

having, "heard and answered a call to serve", a trait directly linked to a history of oppression: to "the communal life of days gone by in rural Ireland, where neighbor helped neighbor as each scratched out a living on rented land"; this legacy is directly linked to "an oppressed people sharing common burdens" (McNamara and Smith 2004, 68). The evocation of Famine memories and those of evictions is here not hard to find, nor is the assumption that the Irish experience is equivalent to the experiences of all oppressed peoples.⁹

Such drawing on a reservoir of diasporic cultural memory corresponds to a post 9/11 sensibility in the US that involves a re-configuration of whiteness as victim credential. Richard Daley, Mayor of Chicago, is photographed in his mayoral chambers with a commemorative plaque of the city of Chicago given prominence. The quotation that is overlaid on his portrait states: "We welcome the immigrant who comes to this country seeking the same freedoms our ancestors sought.... This is not just an Irish dream. It's the American Dream" (McNamara and Smith 2004, 75). This recall to history is an assertion of victim credentials that serves to bolster the notion that the Irish-American is naturally multicultural. Daley's rhetorical conjoining of the 'Irish dream' and the 'American Dream' indicates how such confluences can be particularly useful in a 'nation-building' recovery narrative.

The source of whiteness' "representational power" lies in its ability "to be everything and nothing"; such opaqueness allows it to operate as a signifier that "both disappears behind and is subsumed into other identities" so that "sub-categories of whiteness ... take over". The outcome is that the "particularity of whiteness itself begins to disappear" while at the same time retaining its authority because of the inability to locate the source where this power emanates from (Dyer 2002, 127-8). Irish-American ethnicity is useful in a climate of political correctness because it can be employed as a bolster for white privilege through the positioning of it as an equivalent for all marginalized groups. White experience, while not announcing itself as such, thus assumes a universal signifier. This claim to multicultural authority is based on a selective recall of history where "forgetting is as socially structured as is the process of remembering" (Urry 1996, 50). It also indicates how ethnic labels can fabricate essence¹⁰ and how such labelling "is determined not so much by the nature of its referent as by its semiotic function within different discourses. These various meanings signal differing political strategies and outcomes. They mobilize different sets of cultural and political identities, and set limits to where the boundaries of a 'community' are established" (Brah 1992, 130-131).

Terhi Rantanen (2005, 95) maintains that "diasporas challenge the way we think about nation-states and their homogeneity". The significance of victim diaspora ethnicity is, as noted by Robin Cohen (1997), a particular form of diasporic identity. This status is of relevance to how Irishness as a semiotic register is being employed currently in the US.¹¹ As indicated by close analysis of *The Irish Face In America*, notions of heterogeneity and homogeneity have to be looked at carefully, in order to evaluate how diasporic identification is being employed in the context of both specific cultural locations and in relation to a range of discursive enunciations. Victim diasporic ethnicity, in its current expression as Irish-

9 Here, it needs to be noted that the text produces a singular reading of Irish history, largely stemming from nineteenth-century Irish nationalist rhetoric. Alternative traditions of Irish-Americanism (Protestant-Irish-British) find scant acknowledgement in this generic historicizing.

10 Claims to European ethnicity, of which Irish is the most fashionable in the US at present, can remain 'merely a way to reassert a lost innocence and still benefit from the privilege of whiteness' (Eagan 2006, 27). Current interest in claiming ethnicity can, Gitlin proposes 'offer whites "pride and victimization, assertion without the need for defensiveness"' (Gitlin 1995, 139 quoted in Eagan 2006, 28).

11 Cohen defines a victim diaspora as a 'dispersal from the original homeland, often traumatically' (1997, 26) as opposed to 'diaspora of active colonialisation' (1997, 2). He lists a number of features that define diasporic identity: current Irish-American formulations do not fit into all of these categories (1997, 27). This is, in large part, due to the current diasporic positionality of the Irish-Americans in the US; a positioning that concurs with, what Cohen terms a 'cultural diaspora' (1997, 128).

American identity, can be a useful tool for the nation-state to recoup an identity as heterogeneous, plural and democratic while masking those attributions as being exclusively 'white'. As, Atvar Brah points out: "diasporic or border positionality does not *in itself* assure a vantage point of privileged insight into and understanding of relations of power. ... Rather, there are multiple semiotic spaces at diasporic borders", and I would argue more so for third or fourth generation descendents of immigrants who are now claiming diasporic ethnicity (2007, 289). Catherine Eagan usefully clarifies how: "Memories of the Irish experience of prejudice in America, both real and imagined, have no parallel in the modern-day Irish American experience" (2006, 26) – claims to multicultural inclusivity ignore this reality. And, as Brah goes on to elaborate, "the probability of certain forms of consciousness emerging are subject to the play of political power and psychic investments in the maintenance or erosion of the status quo" (2007, 289).

The call to diasporic positionality in *The Irish Face In America* is a positioning that leaves whiteness as privilege intact; in this, this text serves to bolster the status quo by functioning as a reactionary diasporic identity, even though victim diaspora status may have been the initial impetus. The impression of range in this text is beguiling: while subjects appear in a variety of clothing styles, poses and locations, the overall impression (created by sharp focus rendition of the body) is of contained corporality. Bodily decorum, a hallmark of physiognomic structuring codes, slides here into the remit of the arena of the advertising image – physiognomic register and interpellation come to reside in the potential to partake in commodity ethnicity. Such marketing fits well a desire post 9/11, for a recovery myth that seeks to reinstate the body as a source of control. When direct references are made to 9/11 in *The Irish Face In America* these tend to be found in the accounts of those who have formally been employed in the police and firefighter services or by those who have generational links with these occupations (and predominantly these recalls voice male memory). Links are also made to the traditions of Irish-American culture in the honouring of the dead of 9/11; again the reference is one of a predominantly public, male heritage.

In contrast, those represented as currently serving in the police and firefighter sectors make no direct reference to 9/11 but it does emerge in other ways: namely, through how subjects identify their Irish-American ethnicity, through a 'white' signifier, by topographical location (all of those who are represented in these occupations are situated in New York), the use of props and the signifier of uniform to indicate strict bodily control. The portrait of Kathy Kelly, a New York police officer, is set against the backdrop of a New York skyline. This backdrop, while indistinct is clear enough to evoke memories of what is missing from that skyline. Kelly's narration of her ethnicity situates it as deriving from an inheritance of having a clear sense of right and wrong. Such ethical clarity is attributed to an intuitive egalitarianism and natural multiculturalism: "My heritage has helped me socially and, more importantly professionally. This strong intuitive sense of people also allows me to serve the community" (McNamara and Smith 2004, 93). Ethnic 'roots' are positioned as a version of 'white' multiculturalism that lays claim to ethical integrity.

Dan Meyer identifies his sense of Irish-American identity as deriving from his Irish-American family and the Irish community in New York. Meyer, like Kelly, makes no direct reference to 9/11 but it emerges clearly in the way that the photograph is constructed. Meyer appears in full uniform, smiling and meeting the viewer's gaze through the window of a City of New York firefighter wagon. The framing of the shot includes enough of a commemorative logo to include both the date 9-11-01 and the text "MEMORY OF FALLEN HEROES", and the insignia of the American flag (McNamara and Smith 2004, 99). These visual signs lead the viewer to read the image and Meyer's narrative in a context of the meaning of 9/11. The outcome is that the portrait partakes in the heroising narrative of 9/11, which involves a re-

assertion of traditional masculinity as white, blue-collar, patriarchal and Eurocentric.¹² Equally, in the portrait of Gerry O'Hara (another New York firefighter) the framing is conscious. On either side of O'Hara are two American flags affixed to the firefighter wagon. The relationship between him as central focus and these framing borders works to code Irish-American identity and American identity as implicitly white. O'Hara asserts: "My background led me to this job" (McNamara and Smith 2004, 109).

Irish-American diasporic cultural memory could not operate in this way without a corresponding post Cease Fire (1994) context in the north of Ireland. Allan Sekula in "The body and the archive" reveals how "semantically interdependent" are notions of the lawful and lawless body, and the role that photographic portraiture, from its earliest days, has played in producing these distinctions. According to Sekula, the formal portrait (family or mug shot) is mutually encoded; the law abiding body (signifying bourgeois/white containment) recognises itself in its obverse (the criminal body) – what is revealed, and must be disavowed, is "its own acquisitive and aggressive impulses unchecked" (1986, 15). The need to produce notions of lawful and lawlessness are particularly clear in post 9/11 US foreign policy. Without a corresponding post Cease Fire context in Northern Ireland, the unruly body of the terrorist (as Irish) would undermine this narrativisation of white bodily containment – in this context Irish-American identity can be seen as an antidote to the current construction of the terrorist in the West – the Islamic 'Other' body (not 'white').¹³

The field of memory studies makes clear that the past is a narrative: "what we call the past is merely a function and production of a continuous present and its discourses" (McDowell 1989, 147 quoted in Hirsch and Smith 2002, 9). Ethnic identity in a globalised culture both has the ability to be re-Essentialised and deterritorised and sometimes be combined as such. In the context of the production of such narratives, the digital image "like nineteenth-century photography ... too, is western-eyed" (Robins 1996, 58). It is no longer possible to speak of media and memory as being two distinct practices and just as media partakes in processes of commodification, so too is cultural memory commodified. Ethnic identities are not fixed and static; they are transcribed by transnational flows that undergo processes of apophasis contingent on cultural needs.

This study has sought to analyse what are those cultural needs in terms of the production of a text such as *The Irish Face In America*. It has emphasised the vital role of photography in the production of a collective imagination for 'white' America post 9/11. When we acknowledge that visual culture is now our 'everyday life' (Mizeoff 1998, 3), then, the use of the photograph becomes significant. However, this is still an area that is not always given full consideration in critiques of global identification and diasporic positionality. Photographs do not merely reflect pre-given identities, nor do they offer transparent access to a past that we can remember; rather, photography is a key component in the construction of modern diasporas and current identities. Both cultural memory and identities are: "the product of fragmentary personal and collective experiences articulated through technologies and media that shape ever as they transmit memory" (Hirsch and Smith 2002, 5).

12 See (Negra 2006, 359-363) for an extended discussion of the role that Irishness is serving in the remasculinisation of American culture. The inclusion of Kelly (a white, female police officer) might appear to counter my reading of the re-masculinisation of American culture in 'white' terms. However, Kelly's portrait can be seen as partaking of the text's avowed aim to create a sense of inclusivity. As one, token woman, she does not override what is a clear outcome of 9/11 memory in the US; namely the remilitarisation of American culture in male terms.

13 While there was notable Irish-American investment in a solution to the 'problem' in the north of Ireland, sections who may have sympathised with the cause of a United Ireland seem to have notably decreased post 9/11. This may, be in part, a reaction to the current construction of the 'terrorist without'. It would appear that in this climate that the figure of the Irish terrorist has to be recouped to afford the construction of a 'white' victim narrative post 9/11.

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