other British detainees' obsession with Scottish Highland Shortbread. As Gilroy notes, 'it is there, in that hunger, lodged in those battered and humiliated bodies that the problem of assimilation specified in the 1960s should be laid to rest forever'. If it is 1965 immigration-time in Ireland, we could transcend 'piety and posturing' and lay to rest attempts to specify our own fevered vision of assimilation pretty much straight away.[39]

Conclusion

A detailed reading of preactionary discourse reveals a mass of contradictions and elisions, produced, I contend, both by an adherence to the very forms of circuitous and self-referential arguments it claims to expose, and by the overwhelming desire of some of its chief proponents to situate themselves as visionary contrarians, fearlessly speaking the truth to a 'frivolously sinister' power. Some of the contradictions are obvious; while claiming to oppose orthodoxies that remain undeterred by reason or evidence, little of either are rehearsed in support of what are regarded to be self-evident truths. Where the PC mob peddle reassuring nursery rhymes, preactionary discourse cannot resist narratives of civilisational doom more at home in millenarian Christian video games. The constant dismissal of equality issues as victimologies that feminise the robust public sphere with anti-rational appeals to sensitivity and offence jar with the incessant need for certain writers to be positioned as victims of consensus, who are exposed to insensitive charges of racism, and who have their 'freedom of speech' threatened by other instances and modes of expression.

More fundamentally, preactionary discourse peddles ossified stereotypes of the Enlightenment and Western cultural heritage without ever working through what this means as a field of living epistemological and ethical demands. The defence of progress and rationality can rarely have been advanced by intellectual positions so devoid of curiosity and engagement. Indeed, as Ian Buruma has recently argued, the Enlightenment is increasingly deployed as shorthand for a 'new conservative order' defined against 'aliens and their values'.[40] While I agree that forms of cultural relativism are widely deployed, agreeing that a somewhat inchoate relativism has become a prevalent stance in a semi-corporate NGO sector and in diverse, mediated late capitalist societies is not the same as saying that this irrational, artificial edifice can now be dismantled. In contemporary public discourse there are few self-evident, supra-ordinate moral and ethical coordinates that can simply be restated loudly for the relativist dullards, and to assume so is to presume, in Colin McCabe's phrase, that 'running around on the rugby field of rational controversy will deliver a rational universe'.[41] Precisely the

opposite: the defensive universal certainties of preactionary discourse and the free-wheeling cultural relativism of a depoliticised anti-racism continue to deliver each other.

The pity of this stagnant cycle of straw-person knocking is that, in a strategic sense, preactionary discourse and a committed anti-racist politics largely agree in viewing managerial, state-sponsored discourses of interculturalism and diversity – that increasingly organise civil initiatives and frameworks of debate – as inadequate for understanding contemporary transformations in Ireland. As Ghassan Hage has noted in Australia, the strength of reactionary discourse in Australian politics indicates how the reliance of 'White multiculturalism' on celebrating the richness and gains of diversity has left scant space for speaking about losses. In Hage's argument, this not only strengthens reactionary politics as a potential forum for people looking to articulate loss, but stems from the consistent disavowal of significant change: 'White multiculturalism cannot admit to itself that migrants and Aboriginal people are actually eroding the centrality of White people in Australia'.[42] The parallel is no more than suggestive, but in Irish terms this anxiety of erosion has been consistently articulated in preactionary discourse, and consistently avoided in managerial projects that focus on narratives of gain and richness. In this context, it is then entirely consistent for the Irish state to racialise citizenship[43] and propose increasing forms of biopolitical control over asylum seekers and the part-euphemistic category of 'non-EU migrants' while loudly proclaiming a commitment to diversity and interculturalism. The oft-proclaimed radical skepticism of preactionary discourse will not be brought to bear on this, of course, as it is embedded in the very elisions of race, state and power that preactionary thought depends on.

Notes and References

1 Davina Cooper, *Challenging Diversity: Rethinking Equality and the Value of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 5.

2 Norman Fairclough, '"Political Correctness": The Politics of Culture and Language', *Discourse & Society*, 14: 17 (2003), 20, 22-3.

3 Norman Fairclough, '"Political Correctness": The Politics of Culture and Language', 23.

4 This essay is based on an analysis of articles by selected journalists between March 2005 and March 2007. These journalists were Kevin Myers ('An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*), John Waters (regular column, *The Irish Times*), and Ian O'Doherty (I-Spy and regular comment, *The Irish Independent*). I also read a sample (50%) of opinion pieces printed in *The Sunday Independent* in the same period. Any article which dealt with: (a) descriptions of a 'PC' lobby; (b) political correctness in Ireland; and, (c) immigration to Ireland, was analysed. As this is a broadly discursive piece, I have also included other articles of relevance.

5 Stuart Hall, 'Some "Politically Incorrect" Pathways Through PC', in S. Dunant (ed.), *The*

War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate (London: Virago, 1995), pp. 164-84.

6   Cooper, op.cit., p. 6.

7   See, for example, Gavan Titley, 'Resituating Culture: An Introduction', in *Resituating Culture* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2004), and 'Everything Moves: Beyond Culture and Multiculturalism in Irish Public Discourse', *The Irish Review*, 31 (2004), 11-27.

8   See Alana Lentin, *Racism and Anti-Racism in Europe* (London: Pluto, 2004).

9   Norman Fairclough, op. cit., p. 20.

10 Will Hutton, 'Words really are important, Mr Blunkett', *The Observer*, December 16 2001.

11 Teun Van Dijk, *Communicating Racism: Ethnic Prejudice in Thought and Talk* (London: Sage, 1989).

12 See John Mangan, 'Battler Stations', *The Age*, October 5 2004.

13 Vanessa Trapani, 'The Discursive Dimension of Human Rights: Identity and Diversity Discourses within Contemporary Polish Debates' in Gavan Titley and Alana Lentin (eds), *The Politics of Diversity in Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2007).

14 Gary Younge, 'Take a potshot at the powerless and you too can win a medal of valour', *The Guardian*, March 6, 2006.

15 Teun Van Dijk, op.cit., p. 10.

16 See David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2001).

17 See Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley, 'More Benetton than Barricades? The Politics of Diversity in Europe' in Gavan Titley and Alana Lentin (eds), *The Politics of Diversity in Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2007).

18 Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (London: Pluto/Merlin, 2003), p. xi.

19 Ghassan Hage, op.cit., p. xi.

20 Davina Cooper, op.cit., pp. 6-8.

21 Ian O'Doherty, 'Ello, ello: wot's all this then?', *The Irish Independent*, 7 February 2007.

22 Myers, Kevin, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 12 May 2005.

23 Myers, Kevin, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 10 November 2005.

24 See Arun Kundnani, *The End of Tolerance: Racism in Twentyfirst Century Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

25 Kevin Myers, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 28 October 2005.

26 *The Irish Independent*, 26 January 2007.

27 This is not to suggest that when evidence is proffered that it is accurate. Kevin Myers, for example, refers to the 'Christmas holiday in Birmingham being renamed the "Winterval", so as not to offend immigrants, it apparently being assumed that native Christians had no feelings to be offended' ('An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 10 November 2005). The problem with this example, and many others like it, is that they happen to be inaccurate, but circulated as urban myths that work well within the frame of a comment article. Oliver Burkeman has traced the myth of Winterval and other 'politically correct attacks' on Christmas and detailed how they inevitably involve the re-working of a tenuous link to fit the 'can it get any worse' expectations of relativist meltdown. Burkeman's discussion is worth quoting at length, not least for its implicit judgment on Myers' journalistic standards: 'Perhaps the most notorious of the anti-Christmas rebrandings is Winterval, in Birmingham, and when you telephone the Birmingham City Council press office to ask about it, you are met first of all with a silence that might seasonably be described as frosty. "We get this every year," a press officer sighs, eventually. "It just depends how many rogue journalists you get in any given year. We tell them it's bollocks, but it doesn't seem to make much difference." According to an official statement from the council, Winterval – which ran in 1997 and 1998, and never since – was a promotional campaign to drive

business into Birmingham's newly regenerated town centre. It began in early November and finished in January. During the part of that period traditionally celebrated as Christmas, "there was a banner saying Merry Christmas across the front of the council house, Christmas lights, Christmas trees in the main civil squares, (and) regular carol-singing sessions by school choirs"'. Oliver Burkeman, 'The phony war on Christmas', *The Guardian*, 8 December 2006.

28 Kevin Myers, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 3 February 2006.

29 See Walter Mignolo, 'The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism', *Public Culture*, 12:3 (2000), 721-749.

30 Kevin Myers, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 23 March 2005.

31 John Waters, 'Faith, Reason and Violence', *The Irish Times*, 25 September 2006.

32 John Waters, 'Straining the bounds of tolerance', *The Irish Times*, 30 October 2006.

33 Research would also have shown that Choudry is often invited by programmes which explicitly seek polarised debate. See Ehsan Masood, writing in relation to BBC's *Newsnight*: 'Big Media, Small World', *Open Democracy*, 22 August 2006.

34 John Waters, 'Liberals dig a grave for Europe', *The Irish Times*, 13 February 2006.

35 Kevin Myers, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 10 February 2006.

36 See Gavan Titley, 'Celtic, Christian and Cosmopolitan: "Migrants" and the Mediation of Exceptional Globalisation' in Michael Cronin (ed.), *Transforming Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming).

37 Kevin Myers, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 27 September 2005.

38 Kevin Myers, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 16 September 2005.

39 Paul Gilroy, 'Melancholia and Multiculture', *Open Democracy*, 3 August 2004. See also Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London: Routledge, 2004).

40 Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (London: Atlantic, 2006), p. 36.

41 McCabe, Colin, 'Mumbo-jumbo's survival instinct', *Open Democracy*, 1 February 2005.

42 Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 22.

43 See Ronit Lentin, 'From Racial State to Racist State' in Alana Lentin and Ronit Lentin (eds), *Race and State* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006).