

# The Discourse of the European Financial Crisis from Different Perspectives

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## Introduction

Van Dijk *et al.* describes *intragroup discourse* as ‘The specific discourse characteristics of one ethnic group’; *intergroup discourse* as ‘Intercultural discourse between different groups’ and *intragroup discourse about others* as how ‘members of dominant (majority) groups speak and write *about* non-dominant (minority) groups’ (1997: 145). In this latter category van Dijk mentions more specifically the north-south divide that often characterises prejudicial commentary made by the dominant groups about the weaker groups. Van Dijk has been carrying out research into racist discourse since 1980 and in an early paper (1992) points out that despite commonly held beliefs about prejudice and racism in Europe being the province of the lower classes, it is those in positions of power that promote discrimination albeit with a discourse that is more subdued and moderate:

[...] further analysis of the causes, conditions and manifestations of ethnic prejudice and discrimination also points to a major role of the elites, such as leading politicians, journalists, scholars, police officers, judges and corporate managers. Elites control the access to, and the content and style of public discourse in parliament, the media, textbooks, television programs and movies. (Van Dijk, 1992: 18).

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Such prejudice will of course always be denied by these elite groups but the rising popularity of extreme right-wing political parties in France and Germany even recently suggest a continuation of van Dijk's research findings of a decade ago. Van Dijk also goes on to explain that the media are also responsible for furthering such discourse (1992: 21). In a paper discussing racial prejudice in Spain van Dijk warns that care must be taken as

prejudice and racism are not innate but learned in social situations, not only by imitation of others of the dominant white ingroup, but especially also through its dominant discourses, namely those of politics, the media, research and education. (Van Dijk, 2005: 69).

More recently van Dijk (2009, 2012) has continued to explore how discourse and political discourse in particular builds mental models in the reader and how discourse also assumes shared knowledge in order to achieve its purpose. In order to examine the discourse of the present financial crisis a number of countries' media will be analysed to see what understandings and knowledge are shared between the writers and their audiences as evidenced by the texts.

### **Discourse of the European financial crisis: lazy, greedy and guilty**

Van Dijk's three categorisations of discourse will be used to examine the rhetoric used in the present financial crisis using the dominant discourse of the Germans and French (in the north) to describe Portugal and other countries (in the south). The ethnic stereotyping used in German discourse about the 'lazy' southerners comes as a surprise in a supposedly united Europe and leads to conflict and counter attacks from others in Europe about German bellicosity. The 'intragroup' discourse in Europe that suggests that countries like Greece and Portugal (*they*) have more serious problems than *we* do does nothing to enhance a collective European understanding or culture.

Similar ideas were expressed in the American press reporting the riots in Greece on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2010, according to Greg Palast:

If you read the U.S. papers, the answer was obvious. A bunch of olive-spitting, ouzo-guzzling, lazy Greek workers who refused to put in a full day's work, and retired while they were still teenagers on pensions fit for a pasha, had gone on

a social services spending spree using borrowed money. Now that the bill came due and the Greeks had to pay with higher taxes and cuts in their big fat welfare state, they ran riot, screaming in the streets, busting windows and burning banks with people inside. (Palast, 2011).

In the same article Palast also suggests that this denigration is also generally applied to the unemployed, “Teachers and street cleaners who lose their jobs, factory workers who lose their pensions – especially if they belong to unions – are lazy, greedy and guilty” (*ibid.*). In the American press the mention of unions is obviously playing to a collective understanding by the readers that unions are bad. The fact that the financial crisis has been transferred to the people of the countries in crisis (and the unemployed) who are now depicted as being personally responsible for the crisis is an interesting change of emphasis. However, this must come as a relief to the banks which initially were getting a lot of criticism for their activities which led to the financial crisis in the first place due to their reckless housing loans and other schemes to sell debt.

## **European leaders**

At the beginning of the crisis Germany and France are seen as the two dominant European countries with Mrs Merkel and Mr Sarkozy making the Merkozy combination. However, Germany is usually recognised as the principal partner and the alliance is referred to in the press as Germany taking the lead with France ‘grudgingly’ going along with the German initiatives.

The main significance of the Merkozy summit is that it seemed to signal a shift in emphasis. True, the austerity agenda—promoted by the Germans and grudgingly accepted by the French—is still there. (B.U., 2012).

In addition, what Germany proposes is to implement strategies that are designed in its own image but which it describes as ‘best practice’. “Mrs. Merkel spoke of spreading best practice in labour-market regulation across the euro zone (which is German practice, Mr. Sarkozy admits)” (*ibid.*). The most powerful European country, Germany, is seen as believing that it has the answer and the others are in some way to blame for their problems which would all be put right if they were only more like them, the classic discourse of prejudice.

Van Dijk recognises that the foundation for much stereotypical and even racist dialogue is based on the notion that ‘we’ are always right, better, and superior. Van Dijk describes this as the “familiar form of negative other-presentation, and positive self-presentation” which polarises the mental model created in the reader (2009: 70). This ethnocentrism he suggests, “is especially the case when one group holds more power, has more privileges or more resources and uses the ‘difference’ [...] as a legitimization to dominate or marginalize others” (1997: 145). The countries that have been ‘attacked’ in the financial crisis are generally referred to as ‘poorer’ countries and the dominant group is seen to be so because of financial strength. With the deepening crisis affecting Spain and probably Italy, two very large economies in Europe, this discourse is changing but there is still an element of the ‘north-south’ divide in press coverage.

### **Attacking stereotypes: social networks and blogs**

Despite these attacks, there is evidence of resistance and counter measures taken by minority groups who have used modern communication techniques to spread their message and gain a voice with which to refute the claims of the dominant groups. This is a phenomenon that has also been used in a number of popular uprisings against totalitarian political regimes (the Arab spring for example) and can be seen to be at least as important as the dominant groups’ preferential and traditional access to the mass media. This in turn has made many governments wary of social networks and the power of the internet which they have tried to control in a similar way to the censorship of the press in the past. The blog has even given people a voice in the press, as many online newspapers now provide the opportunity for individuals to make a comment on the articles presented.

Discussing the attempts to get out of the current recession, *The New York Times* published an article on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011 entitled ‘Chronic Pain for the Euro’ written by Steven Erlanger and Liz Alderman which gave the following quotation from a distinguished journalist Bernard Avishai, a contributing editor of the Harvard Business Review, who talks about ‘the southern economies’ of Spain, Portugal and Greece:

[...] the questions now should be: “Under what scenarios are the southern economies most likely to grow? Who will be starting, owning, and profiting from

what businesses? In that context, would not Spain, Portugal, Greece, et cetera, be better off with their own currencies? Would they not become more competitive if they could simply devalue them?" (Erlanger & Alderman, 2011).

The use of 'et cetera' after the list of countries suggests that Ireland is difficult to include in this north-south division of countries but it does of course belong to the list of countries that needed to address the problem of the financial crisis at this time. However, it is made clear later in the article that Italy is also to be included in the 'southern economies'. This makes it even more difficult to understand what a 'southern economy' in Europe is precisely and what its characteristics are, other than the fact that the financial institutions have decided that these countries are high-risk for some reason. The economist Prof. Bart van Ark uses several of these terms in his discussion of productivity in Europe for example, the southern periphery of Europe, and explains that the division of north-south European countries is based on Maddison who uses *per capita* income levels to group European countries (van Ark / Crafts, 1999: 316). However, in Maddison's model Italy is included in Northwest Europe and Ireland in Southern Europe using the per capita criterion. Erlanger and Alderman characterise the countries in the south as 'the poorer countries at the euro zone's periphery that ran up large debts and trade deficits'.

Nevertheless, in the same article we have a quotation from Jean-Paul Fitoussi, professor of economics at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris who claims, "The countries were not in crisis because of bad management of their budget" (Erlanger and Alderman, 2011) which is a very different discourse to that of the dominant countries in Europe and indeed of many of the politicians within those 'southern economies' who blame the previous government for the predicament that they find themselves in which is the case in Portugal. Fitoussi is also quoted as saying:

Both Spain and Ireland have run balanced budgets, or even budget surpluses, in recent years, and both were well within the Maastricht criteria, but became speculative targets in the credit crisis anyway; Italy has one of the lowest budget deficits in the euro zone, and runs a primary surplus, meaning that its budget is in the black when debt service is discounted. (Erlanger and Alderman, 2011).

This discourse published by an outside (American) newspaper can be seen to be intragroup discourse about others, however, it is written by journalists in Austria and France with American and European experts commenting on

the situation which could place it more as intergroup discourse. The foreign correspondent is expected to have a greater understanding for what is going on in the area they operate in even though they are writing for a national audience. Van Dijk discussing the use of experts or 'evidentiality' in discourse argues that using expert testimony, apart from being a characteristic of academic discourse, is a device used in other discourses that lends more reliability or credibility to the knowledge contained in the text (cf. 2012: 600). Hence the text is more persuasive for the reader even if the information or facts are introduced by saying 'experts say'. In this case using the names of the experts and giving enough bibliographical information to support their position as 'experts' makes the information even more believable to the reader.

Therefore, if we are persuaded by the experts' views expressed in this article, as van Dijk claims, then this article demonstrates how difficult it is to understand exactly what the financial problems are that have made these countries 'speculative targets' and has led to the 'attacks' on them. It could however be seen to be part of the resistance discourse or 'dissident scholarly work' (van Dijk, 1997: 165) attempting to give a more balanced, less prejudicial account of the countries under attack. This can also be found in the information published about the financial crisis available from such publications as *The Alternative Press* which attempts to give an independent view of the crisis, its roots and causes. The latter, as is the case with the Palast article cited above, takes the view that it was American banks that managed to force a change in the financial regulations in 151 countries in order to sell useless bonds which in turn led to the financial problems in European banks and thence, European countries because they felt the need to support their banks to prevent bankruptcies. Many banks are seen to be 'national', despite the fact that they are often owned by other international groups, and this perception leads to the nationalist reaction by governments to preserve what is 'ours'.

### **The American solution**

European leaders are seen by American newspapers to have made a mistake in the application of the austerity measures put forward by Germany. The comparison is made with the American system which transfers money from the richer states to the poorer ones as is necessary. Once again we have the discourse that 'we' have the answer and are 'right' (positive self presentation). The Americans see this lack of mutual support as the underlying flaw in the

European system because of the reluctance of the richer European countries to transfer funds to the needier countries named the 'periphery'. Instead a policy of 'fiscal austerity' is proposed. Fiscal austerity can be seen to be a euphemism suggesting reducing taxes which appears to be a more palatable description for the measures proposed than raising more tax revenues in the countries that are being attacked by the financial markets. Austerity means an economic policy to reduce government spending but when this is added to fiscal which is related especially to taxes there appears to be a strange juxtaposition in terms. Moreover, as mentioned above, in such countries as Greece the population are portrayed as avoiding paying any taxes.

An article about the Euro zone crisis in *The Economist* (January 14<sup>th</sup> 2012) follows this American line and describes the problem through Standard and Poor's (S&P) evaluation as having been misunderstood:

According to S&P, EU leaders have misdiagnosed the euro-zone crisis. They have focused too much on tackling the increase in governments' budget deficits, which is only part of the problem. As a result, they did not pay enough attention to the deeper causes of the crisis: the divergence in competitiveness between the euro-zone's core of strong economies and its struggling "periphery" as well as the huge cross-border debts that stem from this gap. Reforms based solely on fiscal austerity could easily become self-defeating, notes S&P. (J.O., 2012).

The downgrading of France itself from its triple A financial status has been seen to be one of the factors contributing to President Sarkozy's downfall in May 2012 and in turn led to questions about the (American) rating agencies criteria and powerful status.

S. & P. warned in December that it might downgrade many of the 17 nations that share the euro largely because it said European politicians were moving too slowly to strengthen the monetary union and because the euro zone's problems were propelling Europe toward its second recession in three years. European politicians, in turn, criticized S. & P.'s downgrade plans as providing no meaningful new information to investors but simply stoking a sense of crisis. (Alderman and Donadio, 2012).

Two strategies were adopted; the first was to ask what legitimacy the rating agencies had and why there were no European rating agencies. The argument being that had there been European rating agencies these would not of course

have seen a problem with France and therefore would not have demoted its economic status from the highest triple A rating (defending the nation). The second strategy was to deflect the problem from France itself by looking sideways and pointing out that Britain (a long time thorn in the side of Europe) was in a worse position than France was. This in turn led to a British counterattack on France which is portrayed in *The Economist* as being a rather jocular comment made on the BBC:

Were it not for the seriousness of the euro crisis, with Christine Lagarde, managing director of the IMF, warning of the risk of a 1930s-style depression, the current spat between France and Britain would be rather amusing. A couple of days ago Christian Noyer, governor of the Banque de France, broke with the opaque reserve traditional for central bankers by declaring that any decision by the rating agencies (two of the big three are American, and therefore “Anglo-Saxon”) to downgrade France’s triple-A status could not be justified by economic fundamentals:

Otherwise, they should start by downgrading Britain which has more deficits, as much debt, more inflation, less growth than us and whose credit is collapsing Today, France’s finance minister, François Baroin, joined in:

The economic situation in Britain today is very worrying, and you’d rather be French than British in economic terms.

This latter pronouncement provoked a joking reference on BBC radio this morning to a Frenchman’s assertion to Lord Palmerston, a British prime minister in the 19th century, that if he were not French he would like to be English. To which Palmerston allegedly replied that if he, too, were not English, he would like to be English. (J. A., 2011).

The use of the term ‘spat’ in this article appeals to the contextual knowledge of the British in recognising that this is a ‘minor, insignificant disagreement’ and that the French take things too seriously. The discourse of ‘we’ are better than ‘them’ is fundamental to understanding national discourses which take this line to defend themselves or justify their position. Such discourses are invariably used in any situations of conflict or war and have been amply studied (cf. van Dijk *et al.*, 1997; Thorne, 2006, and so on). The antagonistic diatribes between Britain and France have been going on for centuries and seem to recur whenever there is a suitable opportunity. The use of the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ to include the Americans too whenever this is beneficial for France’s argument of ‘not Latin’ and therefore not similar to many European cultures and derogatorily used to describe economic ideas which are ‘alien’ to French ideals.



## **Veto**

The position of Britain isolating itself by refusing to accept the European treaty to limit government debt is described in the American (Anglo-Saxon) press as a negative thing thus losing the useful British (Anglo-Saxon) attributes of 'practicality and economic liberalism' in the EU:

Britain's isolation and the visible division in the union are not welcomed by most members, who value British practicality and economic liberalism and see it as a vital part of the European single market. (Erlanger and Alderman, 2011).

Economic liberalism is seen by France to be an anathema and is also seen to be one of the characteristics of a number of Scandinavian countries which are firmly in the richer nations sector, although not all members of the euro zone. Van Ark (1999) describes Northwest Europe as containing the more productive countries in Europe with which the southern and eastern economies have to try to catch up, although at the time van Ark was also writing about a recently reunited Germany and the need to bring East Germany up to the standard of West Germany.

France is seen to take delight in having a privileged position in Europe and being in a position to keep Britain and the 'Anglo-Saxons' out:

But the president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, has for the moment secured a long-cherished French ambition: an agreement on holding frequent summits of national leaders from an inner core of countries, excluding Britain. (Bagehot, 2011).

In Britain, France is seen as deliberately trying to ostracise other 'awkward' members of the EU in order to concentrate control in the hands of certain leaders which includes France and Germany of course. However, France is denigrated in the Anglo-Saxon press as a 'junior partner' to Germany

But especially for France, on the brink of losing its AAA credit rating and now the junior partner to Germany, this is a famous political victory. President Nicolas Sarkozy had long favoured the creation of a smaller, "core" euro zone, without the awkward British, Scandinavians and eastern Europeans that generally pursue more liberal, market-oriented policies. And he has wanted the core run on an inter-governmental basis, i.e. by leaders rather than by supranational European institutions. (Charlemagne, 2011).

The political battle lines are being drawn in this way even within the European commission (led by Durão Barroso) and the stronger European nations. Britain is seen to have caused a rift which might lead to agreements that fall outside the remit of the commission which requires all members to accept the agreements reached and is thus challenging the power of the commission itself. France is also described as wanting 'core' government with fewer players. We move now from 'core' and 'periphery' countries to 'core' and 'periphery' leaders.

Within Britain the attitude to Europe is also seen with some disquiet with Bagehot suggesting that "Successive British governments have treated Europe as a flawed, overpriced but geographically unavoidable mechanism for eliminating some barriers to competition and trade." (2011). 'Overpriced' calls upon the collective knowledge of Margaret Thatcher's famous 'handbagging' of Europe in order to reduce Britain's financial contribution.

However, the political problems caused by Britain's veto are also shown through the recent drubbing of the coalition government at the polls (May, 2012) which suggests that the measures taken by the government are not pleasing the British electorate:

Prime Minister David Cameron's stance was initially popular at home, but his coalition partner, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg of the Liberal Democrats, said that Mr. Cameron's effort to veto was "bad for Britain" and could leave it "isolated and marginalized." (Bagehot, 2011).

Leaving the EU is a popular political stance only for the Conservatives but not for their Liberal Democrat partners.

Once again being on the periphery is seen as a bad place to be and leads to isolation which is a bad position to be in. *Collins Dictionary* 2011 defines periphery as:

1. the outermost boundary of an area
2. the outside surface of something
3. anatomy the surface or outermost part of the body or one of its organs or parts

It is clear from the examples of usage given that this is used to indicate being away from the mainstream. If we have a periphery there must be a 'core' which amongst the eleven definitions in *Collins* 2011 is described as

“the central, innermost, or most essential part of something”. This makes the countries at the core the most essential and important and, by inference, those at the periphery unessential and unimportant not really taking part in the business of Europe. This discourse is consistent over the time of the crisis and geographical distance is often described to reinforce the ostracism from central European membership.

In Portuguese a similar term *‘periferia’* or *‘periférico’* is used in relation to its position and those of Greece and Ireland. The *Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa* (online) gives the following definitions:

**periferia**

(grego *periphéria*, -as, circunferência, superfície arredondada)

s. f.

1. Contorno de uma figura curvilínea.
2. Circunferência, círculo.
3. Superfície de um sólido.
4. Contorno de um corpo ou de uma superfície.
5. Zona próxima ou vizinha. = CONTIGUIDADE, PROXIMIDADE, VIZINHANÇA
6. Conjunto das zonas situadas à volta do centro de uma cidade, mas a alguma distância deste. = ARRABALDES, ARREDORES, SUBÚRBIOS

**periférico** *adj.* Situado na periferia.

This suggests a slightly more favourable connotation if we take the fifth definition of *‘vizinha’* (neighbouring area) however, the *‘arredores’* (suburbs) are not always seen as the place to be, and once again contrasts with being at the centre of the city or in this case the EU.

## Democracy

Most European governments are now becoming aware that they are likely to be removed from office by the electorate if their policies are not to the public’s liking. The terms used to describe the countries in Europe that are facing ‘attacks’ are ‘troubled governments’. The ‘trouble’ that all European governments are facing is the problem of democracy and the fact that voters have been changing their governments, often quite dramatically. Many journalists see the problems in Europe as a problem of democracy itself, despite Durão Barroso’s

speech (Joint European Parliamentary Debate, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2012) suggesting that the European Commission is very democratic. Durão Barroso sees the EU as benign and as a 'rescuer' for the troubled governments of Europe.

Governments are cutting spending and raising taxes to assuage bond investors, as well as their would-be rescuers in Brussels and Frankfurt. (Anonymous, 2012a).

This places the European Commission (Brussels) and the German financial system (Frankfurt) as the heroes rescuing those European countries who need help and are the 'victims' of the financial crisis. Although governments who are applying austerity measures are also seen to be trying to appease 'bond investors' who are not named or identified specifically.

The European parliamentary debate with Nigel Farage (European Parliament, November 6<sup>th</sup> 2011) on YouTube has been visited by many people to see the attack made on European leaders who Farage accuses of being unelected and undemocratic failures. This video was shown on Portuguese television news but avoided showing that Durão Barroso was being attacked as well. This protection of one of 'us' is a natural reaction to such an attack by an Englishman (a foreigner, member of a different group) on a Portuguese figure of renown (ingroup member). One of the comments by a viewer posted after an earlier video (Farage, 2010) in which Farage attacks von Rompuy returns to the blame for the crisis and the means by which blame is deflected:

It has nothing to do with bailing out the Greek people, but everything to do with stealing the EU taxpayers blind and giving this money to the banksters. Instead of directing the public's anger at the banksters they try to redirect the blame on the Greek people. [*sic*] (RiktigPolitik comment on Youtube video Farage European Parliament, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2010).

The number of people who have watched these European parliamentary debates shows the possibility individuals and indeed television companies in many European countries have to access differing views and to use these for discussions of European issues which may be uncomfortable for European leaders. Recent discourse by politicians (June 2012) has included suggested measures to ensure the democratic election of EU leaders despite closer political and financial union to face the crisis.

Even the governments that are seen to disagree with Germany's austerity measures have a negligible effect on blocking the process. Indeed editorial opinion sees this opposition as 'self-delusion'.

Governments and the EU are busily drafting the text of a minor new treaty agreed at December's summit, where Mr. Cameron famously cast his veto. Here is a quick reminder. Under pressure from Germany, EU leaders agreed upon a new "fiscal compact" to toughen budget rules. They would amend the EU's treaties with two goals: to remove some political discretion in the first step towards subjecting national governments to tighter fiscal monitoring and sanctions; and to enshrine balanced-budget rules in national constitutions, with the European Court of Justice (ECJ) given powers to rule on whether they comply with European guidelines. Britain demanded a partial veto on future financial regulation. When this was rejected, it vetoed the treaty itself. This did not block anything, but it complicates the legal process by forcing the 17 euro-zone members (and most of the euro "outs") to draft a text outside the EU treaties. (Charlemagne, 2012).

This article demonstrates the need to provide 'a quick reminder' which is in fact a listing of events in the text in such a way as to make sure that the reader is building the picture of the situation that the author wishes to convey but feels may not be a shared understanding with the audience. It begins with Germany using strong-arm tactics 'Under pressure from Germany' to persuade EU leaders to agree. National governments are then 'subjected to tighter fiscal monitoring and sanctions' both of which seem very negative impositions. Sanctions are normally applied to those governments that are doing something bad, often to their own populations as was the case when sanctions were applied by the United Nations in the past to South Africa, Libya, Iran and so on.

The referendum that took place in Ireland over the austerity treaty in May also caused comments about the roles of Germany and France leading Fintan O'Toole to describe the problem, supposedly depicted by an Irish schoolboy, in an editorial in the *Irish Times* thus:

One way of putting the referendum that I like is that Brussels and Germany are the mother and father of the EU and the rest of the countries are kids. And some kids spend the money wisely but some, like Ireland, spend it on crazy things. "So the mum and dad keep giving the kids more and more money. But eventually they put their foot down and say, 'Right, you can keep borrowing our money – if you sign this form to let us know what you'll use it for.'" This, apparently, is what we're teaching our kids now – that we are all children, subject to our strict but benign parents in Brussels and Berlin. The words are those of a primary schoolboy, interviewed on RTÉ Radio to mark Europe Day last week.

They tell us how Europe looks to an intelligent Irish child trying to make sense of the world that awaits him. This is obviously a rather uncomfortable vision for Irish people. But surely it must also be deeply uncomfortable for the Germans. I can't believe that most Germans, who know their own history and Europe's, feel easy with the notion that other countries are being infantilised in this way – and especially that Irish kids are now being taught to think of Germany as a literal fatherland. Haven't we been here before? The founding idea of the EU was precisely that no country – and specifically Germany – should ever again be in a position to claim hegemony over Europe. (O'Toole, 2012).

The German and French parents reprimanding their out of control offspring, the countries that are suffering from the financial crisis most is not accepted lightly by the Irish nor by the Portuguese. Similar to this Irish example, in Portugal we find a schoolboy addressing the Portuguese football team on television reading out his appeal to exhort the team to do its best in the UEFA Cup saying that the team need to 'change the opinion that the world has of us (Portuguese) on the football pitch and show that we are not weak and lazy' ("mudar em campo a opinião que o mundo tem de nós ...mostrar que não somos fracos e preguiçosos") a fact that is deplored by Fernando Madrinha in his "Carta a Guilherme" (2012: 10), as by saying this Madrinha points out that the schoolboy is implicitly accepting this offensive description of Portuguese people. In contrast with this we find O'Toole describing the Irish schoolboy as 'intelligent' (2012). Stereotypical labels of the 'weak and lazy kind' need to be rejected not accepted by the people they are used against. However, the essay Guilherme reads says that he has no intention of becoming a footballer but rather a doctor which also feeds an intragroup discourse of prestige within Portuguese society.

As with the stereotyping of the Greeks in the American press, some Greek journalists admit that there are problems with paying taxes and corruption in Greece and Madrinha also admits there are some lazy people in Portugal but generalizations of this kind do not help to solve the current problems the Portuguese are facing (cf. Madrinha, 2012). They do however lead to a rejection of such attitudes.

Madrinha also questions the fact that Guilherme says he will only stay in Portugal if it is worthwhile ("se valer a pena") which again has echoes in Ireland where massive migration of young qualified people has also been taking place. This migration, in contrast with previous migrations, is a 'brain drain' of qualified people and is seen in both countries as detrimental to them over time.

The use of letters, supposedly written by children, already has a long history. In 1995, when President Clinton visited Northern Ireland, a letter supposedly written by a child called Catherine Hamill about the death of her father in the Troubles was the centre of attention in the President's visit to Belfast. Auberon Waugh writing in *The Spectator* (1995) points out the very many discrepancies in the stories told about this visit and the letter which he describes as 'effective theatre' and 'a brilliantly successful exercise in sentimentality for sentimentality's sake' but with no underlying substance except to improve Clinton's chances in the elections. Using attractive children to send propaganda messages is a characteristic of political discourse and distracting populations in distress from their problems through football has a long history in Portugal and was one of Salazar's three f's: fado, Fatima and football (*fado, Fátima e futebol*). The economic rating of the countries in each of the groups has been mentioned in the press together with the chances attributed to those teams in the Euro championship. Much discourse has centered around the central 'core' European countries and the ailing 'periphery' which has led to the suggestion that it would be fun to see Greece put Germany 'out of the Euro' rather than vice versa.

### **German domination**

Several countries have voiced the idea that the whole reason for creating a united Europe was to avoid German domination of Europe and indeed conflict with France in particular. However, even the cosy relationship between Germany and France has taken a beating with the recent change of government in France. The news on television in Portugal, RTP May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, led with 'For the first time since the crisis started, France and Germany don't see eye-to-eye.' ("Cimeira Europeia: Pelo primeiro vez desde o início da crise, Alemanha e França sem sintonia"). The move to the left has raised hopes that there will be a change in the German position. The editors of the *Journal of Socialist Theory* however see the crisis as unsolvable and that the cosy relationship between Sarkozy and Merkel was not in fact all that serene:

The present Euro crisis is insoluble because it is a microcosm of the general crisis, which itself has no solution. However, its forms are specific. We have, in the first instance, the expression of German nationalism, representing the first time that the German bourgeoisie feels that it can shake off the heritage of the last World War and Nazism and express its interests directly and clearly. The clash

between France and Germany, Sarkozy and Merkel, has been relatively low key but it is there nonetheless. However, the Germans have found that it is not easy. The less prosperous countries of the Eurozone are not prepared to accept German dictation of the economic terms of survival. There is no obvious reason, in any case, why the terms of trade between Germany and any particular country in the EU should be what they are. (Ticktin *et al.*, 2011).

More and more journalists and even the American President Barak Obama at the summit in Mexico (June 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>, 2012) are warning that if the crisis is not halted soon the problem will not only affect Germany itself but also the world (and America in particular). The BBC reported that President Obama said, “What I have heard from European leaders during these discussions, they understand the stakes, they understand why it’s important for them to take bold and decisive action, and I am confident they can meet those tests.” (BBC, 2012). Once again this discourse shows that the problem is ‘theirs’ and not ours and America is showing that it has made clear to European leaders (Germany, France, Italy, EU and Britain) what they should do. Paul Krugman sums up the American position on Europe thus:

The next time you hear people invoking the European example to demand that we destroy our social safety net or slash spending in the face of a deeply depressed economy, here’s what you need to know: they have no idea what they’re talking about. (Krugmann, 2012).

In addition, the Americans are now suggesting that Europe needs to create a central bank along the lines of the American Federal Reserve that has the power to close down failing banking institutions in Europe (cf. Tornell & Westermann, 2012). The latest summit meetings taking place in the EU have now expanded to include not only France but also Spain and Italy.

## Portugal

Many of the issues raised above can be found in the Portuguese press but showing a bias towards the Portuguese position on those issues. Recent headlines in the Portuguese press suggest that Portugal intends to take some innovative measures to extract itself from the crisis one of which is to sell houses to retired French people (cf. Ribeiro, 2012: 13). This refers back to the initial



housing boom and bust in America which is seen to be the starting point for the global crisis.

Deferring attention from Portuguese problems can be found in the *Expresso* of the same date. Mention is made of the rising unemployment figures for Portugal (“Últimas: Desemprego sobe”) on this same Economics first page but is immediately hedged by mention of the Spanish and Greek figures pointing out that these are the highest and second highest in Europe respectively, the inference being that it is not so bad here as it might be.

More propaganda techniques are found on page 3 of the Economics supplement under the heading *A confiança que vem da Alemanha* [Confidence comes from Germany] we find a picture (cf. Foto Alberto Frias 2012: 3) of the prime minister Passos Coelho raising his index finger in a gesture of superiority ‘telling’ the German Minister of Economy and Technology, Philipp Rosler, what to do. The text accompanying this photograph *‘Diplomacia Económica’*, says that the German minister came to express confidence in Portugal and respect for the efforts made by the Portuguese people to meet the Troika’s austerity programme (cf. Economia, 2012: 3). We read that Portugal has Angela Merkel’s government’s support, with the caveat ‘as far as this is possible’. Germans therefore see themselves as offering a helping hand to the ailing economies of Europe.

In contrast to this positive showing, on page 5 we find an article by Nicolau Santos entitled “Porque vai (e está a) falhar a receita” [Why the recipe will (and is already) fail(ing)] which criticises the Troika programme because it was made by and is being carried out by people who do not ‘understand the Portuguese situation’ (Santos, 2012: 5). Santos gives seven reasons for failure to meet the measures outlined by the Troika which include needing more time and money together with the problems of falling consumer spending, falling costs through privatizations, exports and foreign investment but it is the idea that ‘they’ do not understand ‘us’ which is given prominence in a highlighted text box in red (cf. *ibid.*).

Looking for a scapegoat to blame for the present crisis, the Economics supplement of the *Expresso* has a whole page article (Silvestre e Pereira, 2012: 11) featuring a picture of the ex-prime minister José Socrates with the banner headline “Quem tramou Portugal?” [Who messed up Portugal?]. The text deals with an article entitled ‘The Next Global Problem: Portugal’ on an American blog (Economix.com) of *The New York Times* written by Peter Boone and Simon Johnson and an investigation which is being carried out by the Departamento de Investigação e Ação Penal (DIAP) to see if this article triggered the problem

with Portuguese debt at the time Greece was requesting a bailout (Silvestre / Vieira Pereira, 2012: 11). The picture at a glance without closer reading suggests that the ex-prime minister caused the Portuguese problem single-handedly and is the type of discourse that has been used repeatedly by the present government both in their electoral campaign and since getting into office.

Discussing Agricultural reform, which is always an issue for any country wishing to join the EU, the article “Reforma da PAC agita Bruxelas” [CAP reform upsets Brussels] suggests that there may be a much more even distribution of aid between the richer and poorer nations in Europe (Rosário, 2012: 14). The article points out that France has the lion’s share of the subsidies with 296 euros, Portugal gets 187 euros and Latvia 94 euros per farmer but that these are expected to become a little more even in 2017 with 287, 202 and 141 euros respectively (*ibid.*). The title of the article itself suggests that the intended reforms are cause for consternation in Brussels and is more credible still as the author Daniel Rosário is described as the correspondent for the *Economia* section of the *Expresso* in Brussels. Many countries are now questioning whether they should have accepted the terms for their entry into the EU giving up many of their traditional activities and are beginning to recommend that people return to small scale and urban cultivation for the good of all. These returns to traditional roots are also usually portrayed as benefitting people, the planet and its environment rather than the once prevalent view that these were degrading menial activities of an undereducated population. Given that Portugal now exports qualified people to fill the gaps in the more advanced countries in Europe, the argument that the countries ‘in trouble’ are so because of poor educational levels is now hard to sustain.

## Conclusion

It is clear that there has been a gradual shift in attitudes as the crisis in Europe continues but that the same discourse techniques can be identified in the media and blogs from both European countries and the U.S.A. Every country seeks to justify its position and suggest that they know the answer which is to do things ‘their’ way. Those countries that are being attacked attempt to deflect the criticism in a number of ways one of which is to use league tables on different issues and another to suggest that those others who are making comments and suggestions for change do not understand that particular situation and society and its ways and cannot therefore impose solutions from ‘outside’. The rifts that

have affected Europe for centuries are still lurking just beneath the surface and peek out from time to time describing the others as less hard working or lazier than they are. This attitude can even operate within societies to describe the rising number of unemployed people. Despite these attitudes, it is becoming increasingly apparent that a major shift in society is taking place with a move away from a purely capitalist view of life with the constant need for growth and money making, to a more socialist view of a caring inclusive society taking care of one another for the good of all. It remains to be seen if Europe can achieve the kind of closer union that is necessary to overcome the crisis and if the historical resentments of one to another can be overcome.

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ABSTRACT: The problems that Ireland, Greece and Portugal and now Cyprus and Spain have been facing during the financial crisis have led to descriptions of these countries and their people by other European countries as deficient in some ways which in turn has led to a backlash from these countries resisting and refuting the stereotypical discourses used by the economically stronger countries in Europe and north America. Van Dijk's classifications of intergroup discourse, intragroup discourse and intragroup discourse about others will be used as a basis for analysis using articles in the media from a number of countries together with internet resources such as blogs and YouTube.

RESUMO: Os problemas que a Irlanda, a Grécia, Portugal e, ultimamente, o Chipre e a Espanha enfrentaram durante a crise financeira levou a que estes países e respectivos povos fossem vistos de forma negativa pelos seus vizinhos europeus. Estas críticas suscitaram, por sua vez, uma reacção destes países, que têm vindo a resistir e a refutar os discursos estereotipados utilizados pelos países economicamente mais fortes da Europa e dos Estados Unidos da América. As classificações formuladas por T. A. van Dijk *et al.* (1997: 145) no âmbito do discurso sobre os outros (intergrupos, intragrupo e intragrupo sobre outros) serão utilizadas para travejar a análise do discurso de artigos proveniente dos meios de comunicação social de vários países, juntamente com outros recursos na Internet, como *blogs* e *Youtube*.