From Emigration to Immigration: New Dawn for an Intercultural 21st Century Ireland

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Context

Within the course of a decade Ireland has emerged from being a country of emigration to a country of immigration. Since the mid-1990s, Ireland has undergone rapid economic expansion with the recent economic growth resulting in approximately 252,000 migrants entering Ireland over the last 6 years, according to the Irish Times (2003). While a large number of these are returning Irish nationals, there has been a significant increase of non-Irish nationals from outside the European Economic Area (EEA[i]) and Switzerland entering the country, primarily as temporary migrant workers. Additionally, the number of people applying for refugee status has increased from 39 in 1992 to just over 10,000 in the year 2001. Know Racism[ii], the national anti-racism programme, suggested that in 2002, 116,588 non-EEA nationals registered with immigration officials nationally. It was estimated at the time that there were 160 different nationalities living in Ireland. Economists have been suggesting that we will need up to 50,000 immigrants annually to keep up with our economic growth in the next 10 years or so.

In the 2002 census there was a question about 'nationality' rather than 'ethnicity'; of those who filled the relevant box, 91.6% stated that they were Irish and a further 1.3% stated that they had Irish and another nationality. Of the 5.8% who stated that they were not Irish or part-Irish, about half were British and the remainder came from other parts of the world (32,801 EU excluding UK, 26,235 other European, 26,515 Africa, 28,132 Asia, 29,119 America including South America and 8,363 Antipodes).

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[i] EEA: European Economic Area (EU Member States and Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein)
[ii] Know Racism – The National Anti-Racism Awareness Programme (updated in March 2002): Information Pack. See www.knowracism.ie/pdfs/info_pack.pdf.

It should be stressed that there are variations in the legal status of non-EEA/Swiss nationals who have come to Ireland, including categories such as: 'migrant workers', 'family members of migrant workers', 'family members of EEA Swiss-nationals', 'business people', 'visitors', 'refugees', 'asylum seekers' and people who have been granted 'leave to remain'. Over time some of today's immigrants will become Irish citizens through naturalisation and others, legislation permitting, will acquire permanent residency. The current generation of immigrants will give way over time to the second, third, and so on generation of ethnic minorities.

Identity

Immigration into Ireland has revitalised debates on Irish identity. According to Johnson (1994), ethnically, the Irish nation is a pluralist hybrid of Firbolgs, Celts, Vikings, Normans, English, Scottish, Huguenots, etc. He argues that racial purity in the case of the Irish is blatant nonsense. In material published by Know Racism (2002)[iii], it is argued that minority ethnic groups have been, are and will continue to be an integral part of modern Irish society. Yet, definitions of 'identity' – particularly national identity – typically involve a strong distinction between the "internal other" and the "ultimate other". For example, Ireland's "internal others" prior to the recent immigration waves, included such groups and communities as Protestants, Jews, Travellers, Black Irish, Irish-Chinese, Lone Parents, Gays and Lesbians, etc. Socio-economic status also serves as an identity marker in the Irish context. For example, in Dublin there is a stigma attached to having an address in flat complexes such as Dolphin House, St Michael's Estate, Fatima Mansions and Ballymun. This is the case in Cork for those living in Knocknaheeny and those living in Corrib Park, Galway. "Ultimate others" are generally those deemed to be complete outsiders. The "ultimate others" are often graded. In Ireland, for example, migrant workers are on top of the scale and asylum seekers are on the bottom of the scale.

Jacobs and Maier (1998) argue that the concept of identity can only be used with respect to individuals. They argue, however, that individuals do not live on their own, but associate in groups and communities and this association will have consequences for their identities. The concept of identity involves

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[iii] Know Racism – The National Anti-Racism Awareness Programme (updated in March 2002): Information Pack. See http://www.knowracism.ie/pdfs/info_pack.pdf.

two processes: "self-identification" (the way a social actor identifies him/herself) and "categorisations" (identification takes place within parameters imposed by various more or less powerful actors). According to Turner (1982, p.18), group identification has meaning when "we associate ourselves with certain groups and contrast ourselves with others". Weldon (2003, p.3) claims that "the presence of difference is what creates identity and social meaning for individuals". Kertzer and Arel (2002, p.5) claim that "the use of identity categories in censuses and in other mechanisms of state administration creates a particular vision of social reality. All people are assigned to a single category, and hence are conceptualised as sharing, with a certain number of others, a common collective identity." However, Jacobs and Maier (1998) emphasise that identity is not static, but dynamic; hence no form of identity is ever complete or totally stable. On the other hand, they claim that identity should not be conceived of as a loose patchwork but as a more or less integrated symbolic structure with time dimensions (past, present, future) and which provides important competencies to individuals such as assuring continuity and consistency.

Citizenship

Identity and citizenship are related but do not necessarily have the same meaning. Castles and Miller (1998) argue that the laws on citizenship or nationality derive from two competing principles: *"ius sanguinis"* (based on decent from a national of the country concerned) and *"ius soli"* (based on birth in the territory of the country). Changes in relation to acquiring citizenship by birth in Ireland were introduced in January 2005 following the June 2004 citizenship referendum. Increasingly, entitlement to citizenship grows out of long-term residence in the country: the *"ius domicili"* concept. It is worth noting that spouses of Irish nationals may acquire citizenship through *"post-nuptial declaration"*. This provision will cease to exist after November 30th, 2005 due to amendments to the nationality legislation enacted in November 2002. In some countries they have the concept of "denizen" that refers to immigrants who have not acquired citizenship but have permanent residency. They are afforded rights and entitlements over and above those considered short-term residents.

Case Studies

Experiences of Irish citizens, who happen not to be Caucasians, in claiming their Irishness have been mixed. The following three case studies illustrate these experiences. The case studies are drawn from real stories that the author

came across over the last 2 years. The names and other biographical details have been changed to keep the anonymity of those concerned.

1.   In 1998, Kofi (originally from Ghana), his wife (Fatuma) and children (Mustafa, Ayub and Amina) moved to a new estate in a Dublin suburb. All things seemed to be going very well and everyone seemed to be very welcoming, "on the surface at least". The family was very optimistic because they were moving from a tiny flat into a house. Having been granted permission to work based on parentage of an Irish citizen child and subsequently naturalisation, Kofi had finally found "a dream job" having previously struggled to find a job commensurate with his skills and experience. It seemed that nothing could go wrong. After a few days though, children next door started calling the children names. The names called related not only to their skin colour but also to the fact that Amina and her Mum were wearing "Hijabs." This was not a new experience for the family and they hoped that this was going to be temporary. Eventually, some individuals from the community who were appalled by their experience became very supportive and this made a big difference for the family.

2.   Muhammad and Zainabu arrived in Ireland from Afghanistan in 2000 having been victims of abuse by the Taliban regime. They applied and were subsequently granted refugee status. Shortly after they arrived in Ireland, they met Mary McDonald who worked as a development worker in the Lebanon. She met them and took them under her wing. She became their "surrogate mother", taking the place of their parents who died in the late 1990s during the war. The couple recently became Irish citizens through naturalisation. Their two children (born in Ireland) enjoy paying a visit to Mary, "their surrogate grandmother". Although sometimes they are victims of verbal racial abuse, they feel accepted, especially by Mary.

3.   Frances Sutton was born in the early 1980s from a mixed "race" marriage. Her father (Brian) met her mother (Louise) when he was travelling in India during his gap year after college. Up to the age of 4, Frances had not realised that she was different. Having said that, she used to hear people admiring the 'tan' of her skin. When she went to school, she started experiencing subtle forms of bullying from her col-

leagues. A number of her classmates were very supportive and friendly which alleviated her experiences. She made a decision from the age of 10 that she was going to go a British University on completion of her Leaving Certificate. She felt that the situation in relation to her "categorisation" was going to be different in the UK since they had many more people from ethnic minority communities. Recently Frances went to Paris with her classmates. They decided to pay a visit to an Irish pub. Irish people she met in the pub recognised her "Dublin accent", however, they questioned her Irishness. Her British classmates were surprised that Frances's Irishness was an issue of contention just because of her skin colour.

These three case studies outline the mixed nature of the experiences of members of the ethnic minorities in Ireland. Different individuals react differently to their experiences. Human nature tends to take the positive experiences for granted and yet even one negative experience sticks in people's memory for a while. Raven and Whelan (1976) write that a survey on the attitudes towards minorities conducted in 1970 revealed that 61% of the interviewees believed that they would be justified in imposing on others something they believed to be good. Subsequently, Mac Gréil (1997) revealed that a large survey in Dublin in 1972-73 concluded that there was a relatively high level of dormant or latent racism and a moderately high degree of intolerance against political and social outgroups. According to Weldon (2003), Ireland has low social tolerance and high political tolerance.

Tolerance

Weldon (2003) argues that tolerance is a fundamental and necessary value of pluralistic democracies. Sullivan et al. (1982) and Sniderman (1996) stress that tolerance requires citizens to uphold and secure the right of groups, even those they find objectionable, to participate fully in political, social and economic life. Weldon (2003, p.1) concludes that failure to respect the rights of all and tolerate minority voices may lead to "social and economic oppression", or "tyranny of the majority." According to Walzer (1997) tolerant attitudes may include a genuine openness, curiosity, and perhaps respect for different ideas and groups, or at a greater extreme, an enthusiastic endorsement of difference for its own sake. Thus, according to this theory of tolerance, and bearing in mind the mixed experiences of non-Caucasian Irish people as well as the future immigration trends, it is very important to reconstruct the notions and identi-

fications associated with 'Irishness' if the intercultural society that we aspire to is to become a reality in today's Ireland.

Castles and Miller (1998) argue that trends towards the political inclusion of minorities and cultural pluralism can threaten the mainstream constructions of national identity, especially in countries in which it has been constructed in exclusionary ways. According to Delgado-Moreira (2000), societies, regardless of their size, have always been involved in a continuous carousel of identity construction and destruction. No society can resist the absence of differences as organising principles; nor can it keep the same borders forever. He suggests that the concept of diversity stresses the need to agree on fundamental rules (including ideas and values of what is good and just) precisely because they cannot be taken for granted. These ideas will need to be represented so that they can be known, shared and enforced by diverse communities. Such representations must also be consistent and articulated in the rules of a society.

Reflecting on the post-apartheid era in South Africa, Seepe (2002, p.2) argues that "the process of identity definition and formation is linked to the inauguration of a new cultural, political and human consciousness". Castells (1997, p.8) identified three forms and origins of identity including *'legitimising'*, *'resistance'* and *'project identities'*. Dominant institutions and those who are marginalised by the establishment respectively generate legitimising and resistance identities. They both devalue and stigmatise people and have negative connotations. Project identity on the other hand comes about "when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure" (ibid, p.8).

The reconstruction of identity requires, according to Jacobs and Maier (1998), the relativisation and subordination of differences between individuals and groups. In other words, differences have to become secondary or superficial because of a common "we" which discriminates between 'the people' and those who are 'outsiders' of the nation. Hall (1986), Keith and Pile (1993) suggest the need for interpreting identity as a process rather than an outcome. For the newcomers, according to Prestreshi (2003), the diasporic experience offers a unique context and opportunity for redefining and transforming identities because it offers a re-negotiation between circumstances both in the country of origin as well as in the host country.

Role of Adult Education

Education plays a critical role in the reconstruction of identity. According to Salt (1985), the multi-positionality of diasporans in and between two cultures (homeland and new home) makes education a prime vehicle of identity reconstruction by pulling people towards integration, whilst at the same time becoming a focus of resistance stemming from homeland identity. As the Irish nation becomes more and more intercultural, it is time to start thinking about what it means to be Irish in the context of the current demographic situation. This debate can get inspiration from the project identity concept. It is better to act now rather than wait for troubles in the future to redefine who "we" are. Education, both in the formal and informal sector, will play a vital role in the reconstruction of Irishness.

Adult education has a crucial role to play in the reconstruction of Irishness. On the one hand, adult education offers a second chance to those who did not get the opportunity to learn about diversity through the formal education acquired in the past and to familialise themselves with the realities of today's diverse and intercultural Ireland. On the other hand, just like today's school-going generation, adult learners have a chance to meet with people from the ethnic minorities through the education setting.

Adult education offers a unique setting in so far as it offers the opportunity for participants to participate in discussions without worrying too much about exams associated with the formal system of learning. Issues around diversity and immigration are sometimes emotional and adult education is better positioned for rational discussions stemming from such emotive issues. It is also fair to say that the response to immigration from the general public has been great in as far as volunteering in immigrant/refugee support groups is concerned. It is the case that some of the participants in adult education have an interest in the discussions on immigration and diversity. In having balanced discussions, adult education participants will acquire knowledge and information that they will be in a position to pass on to members of their family and those with whom they have regular interaction.

 It is critical for adult education providers to include modules on anti-racism, cultural diversity, globalisation and immigration in adult education programmes. The delivery of such modules will stimulate rational discussions and this will help in dispelling the myths about immigration and the rights and entitlements of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland.

Innovative initiatives such as intercultural food fairs, mentoring programmes and other intercultural activities will enhance the potential of adult education participants in the reconstruction of Irishness. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for adult education providers and society at large.

The adult education programmes with anti-racism, diversity, globalisation and immigration modules, coupled with interaction with immigrants both direct and indirect will, over time, inspire participants in adult education programmes to play an active role in the redefinition of Irishness. As MacEinri (2002) suggests, multiculturalism and integration are not just about the foreigners in our midst, but also about accepting diversity in the broadest sense. Adult education has the potential to offer the participants the tools to participate actively in the discussions on the redefinition of "Irishness". It offers also the opportunity to participants to engage within a group setting and, indeed, with the wider society in dealing with the myths associated with "otherness", and more specifically with the "ultimate others".

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