

Migration and social



In the past 10 years an unprecedented economic boom, the peace process in the North and significant inward migration has transformed Irish society. **Prof Ronaldo Munck** puts this social and cultural change in context and highlights the role DCU is playing in becoming an internationalised university.

Almost exactly 90 years ago, outside the GPO in Dublin, the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic declared that: ‘The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally...’

So who is part of that ‘whole nation’, and who is an Irish citizen today? The way we answer that question will determine what sort of Ireland we, and most importantly our children, will live in. We can take a narrow and parochial view, or stretch our democratic imaginations to reinvent Ireland in a new intercultural mode, fit for the internationalised society we are creating.

The 2002 Irish census is the only reliable benchmark on national diversity in Ireland. Migrants living in Ireland at that time came predominantly from the UK and other EU countries (3.4%), with a small Asian (0.5%), African (0.5%), non-EU European (0.5%), and US (0.3%) contingent. Since then – as current debates in the national press testify – there has been a considerable inflow of migrants into Ireland, particularly from the new EU accession countries, since May 2004. Thus, in 2005 there were 11,000 PPS numbers issued monthly by the State. People born outside of Ireland probably now account

for 8 per cent of the total Irish labour force, about average for the EU. When the Central Statistics Office conducted the 2006 census, it included an ethnic component for the first time and the picture will soon become clearer. Projections by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) estimate that of a total population in 2030 of 5 million, perhaps over 1 million would be born overseas that would amount to 18 per cent of the total population.

Ireland is not, of course, the first country to attract inward migration but it is a relative novelty in a country that, until a decade ago, was a steady and long-standing exporter of its own population. The Irish Government is currently conducting the

consultation process around how to best ensure the social integration recently arrived and yet to arrive on our shores. If national diversity increases considerably without a coherent policy of social integration, then there is obvious potential for conflict. Migrants are susceptible to economic exploitation, social isolation and political targeting by xenophobic groups. Racism is a

scourge that undermines social cohesion and corrodes the body politic, if it ever gets a grip. Disadvantaged sectors of the local population might for their part feel – rightly or wrongly – that they are being ‘displaced’ from jobs, residential areas or social facilities by migrants.

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integration: reinventing Ireland?

Conscious of the importance of a proactive social integration policy in relation to migrants, the EU has recently issued a set of Basic Common Principles that will soon become binding on all member states. They include labour market inclusion, family reunification, long-term residence rights and anti-discrimination measures. If Europe is to meet its Lisbon targets on employment, maintain healthy cohesive societies, and live up to its values of equality and openness, it will need to look closely at its immigrant inclusion policies, and the meaning of civic citizenship.

Integration is a two-way process, and yet there is little empirical data measuring immigrant and host community attitudes and perceptions around the success or otherwise of immigration into Ireland. This is especially the case in regard to the diversity of immigrant communities in terms of their geographical origin and cultural heritage. Integration occurs in common spaces and, although economic migration in the workplace is well understood, political and cultural migration occurs in a vast array of spaces that are very well understood. So far, with the exception of a few spatially confined studies and some omnibus surveys, there has been no in-depth research in the economic, social and political integration of immigrants in Ireland. Without that evidence base, we cannot develop a coherent policy, and we certainly

cannot make political points based on hearsay, prejudice or at best anecdotal evidence.

The fact that by 2030 there may be 1 million people in Ireland who were not born here, with some 160 national/cultural backgrounds between them, is a great opportunity. Ireland has changed dramatically over the last 10 years due to an unprecedented economic boom. The 'Celtic Tiger' was born, bringing with it unprecedented and rapid change in Ireland's social and cultural patterns. The peace process in the North also began around then, and it also will reconfigure what Ireland looks like. Migration on a significant scale is thus the third great social

transformation we are witnessing but it needs to be considered in relation to the two other ongoing transformations. It is reinventing Ireland before our very eyes and in ways where the outcome is uncertain. It is not a question of adding a bit of 'colour' to the tricolour but it will involve a fundamental reworking of what is means to be Irish. In the era of globalisation – with the rapid and complex flows of investment, ideas, images and people – we cannot revert to a 'blood and belonging' conception of nation. We need to be imaginative and lead in creating a

society at once diverse and inclusive, where we can all play a role, even if we cannot trace our 'Irishness' back 800 years.

There are unfortunately, but perhaps inevitably, those in Ireland who will react with fear and hostility towards the 'foreigners' in our midst. Some of this reflects the fear and insecurity created by all the social transformations of the last decade and the fact that many in society have not benefited from the

Celtic Tiger. Some hostility is quite illogical. Thus, it is quite common to hold romantic views of the Irish emigrant as a bold and entrepreneurial figure going out to conquer the 'new world' while feeling that the 'economic migrant' in Ireland is a

self-seeking and sponging drain on the State. At other times, migration acts as scapegoat for other ills in society such as unemployment or housing that is out of reach for ordinary people. We do have to deal with these perceptions through political argument based on robust and reliable research.

These who are in public life have a responsibility, in my view, to dampen irrational fears and quell any nascent hostilities towards their fellow citizens. Thus I find it quite unacceptable for a judge to suggest that Nigerians drive around without insurance or that 'coloured' people

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are prone to shoplifting. Likewise, it is quite unbelievable that a Government minister can stand up in the Dáil and tell a fellow TD to ‘stick with your kebabs’ when the latter was a well-known supporter of the then striking GAMA workers from Turkey. Nor is it particularly helpful for a leader of an ostensibly progressive political party to declare that: ‘There are 40 million or so Poles after all, so it is an issue we have to look at’, thus conjuring up images of Ireland being flooded by immigrants. These three examples of a pretty crass racism or xenophobia hold no place in the debate around migration and social integration; they are certainly unworthy of public figures in a democracy. This is not a question of some holier than thou anti-racism used to badger one’s opponents. It is just that it is not possible to move towards successful integration of the new migrant communities without a positive engagement with them.

It is necessary, I would argue, for all those in public life, and that includes the public intellectuals working at universities, to engage in an open and constructive debate on how we wish to influence Ireland’s ‘reinventing’.

DCU has long been an active contributor to Ireland’s social and economic development. We are now contributing actively to the research needed to forward the development of policy on migration and social integration. The Intercultural Workplace Programme has involved the DCU schools of languages, communications, education, nursing and business, as well as the support of the Educational Trust. Some of that interdisciplinary work is profiled in the following pages and on our website (www.dcu.ie/themes/international). We are working with the private sector (McDonald’s, Glanbia and others), with civic society organisations (Migrant Rights Centre, Integrating Ireland and others), and with the Government sector (Fáilte Ireland, Dublin City Council and others) to pursue this programme of policy-driven research. We have brought together all the Irish universities in an

exciting new online journal called the *Irish Migration Race and Social Transformation Review*. Furthermore, we believe in a partnership approach based on mutual respect and transparency as the most appropriate one for the task at hand.

Finally, we intend to ‘practise what we preach’ through our Intercultural Campus Initiative that will seek to make DCU a truly internationalised university to the benefit of all.

To conclude, I’ll leave you with the words of Séamas Dall Mac Cuarta, Meath’s wandering poet and musician. In the mid-17th century, he found himself visiting in Chorr an Chait, Omeath. The locals did not want to know him, his music or his ways. They preferred to hide away like badgers in their lairs rather than learn the ways of the wider world. They did not welcome the stranger in their midst; they shunned him. Then as now, a traveller from another parish or from across the seas would be viewed suspiciously by the narrow-minded. To move from one place to another in this world is part of life, it is normal and we should welcome the music and the ways of the traveller/migrant.

**Uaigneach sin, toighe Chorr an Chait,
uaaigneach a bhfir is a mná,
’s dá bhfaighdís ór agus fíon
cha dtig aon díobh i gceann cháich.**

**I gceann cháich cha dtig siad
ar ar cruthaíodh thiar is thoir,
ar ar cruthaíodh ó Neamh go lár –
ionann sin is béasa an bhroic.**

**Ní hionmhain leis an rí-bhroc aoibhneas, aiteas nó spórt,
ní hionmhain leothu saoi, draoi ná cumadóir ceoil,
ní hionmhain leo Síomas Caoch ná cuidiú Néill Óig,
is fanadh gach n-aon mar a mbiad ag tochailt an phóir.**

Séamas Dall Mac Cuarta (1647D1735)