Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the state

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The ‘Celtic Tiger’ has come to provide a convenient shorthand for Ireland’s prosperous and rapidly growing economy. Like all metaphors, it occludes as much as it includes; as a way of representing, it is just as much a way of misrepresenting. The implication of a prosperity in which ‘a rising tide lifts all boats’ masks the growth of poverty and inequality and generalises what is, in fact, only a restricted experience of newly found wealth, within a broader context of class and gender stratification and regional underdevelopment. It also masks growing racism within Irish society.

The central aim of this chapter is to examine the current hegemonic construction of Ireland as an open, cosmopolitan, multicultural, tourist-friendly society. It will argue that underlying the celebrated liberal values of freedom, choice and opportunity, which are supposedly intrinsic to the cultural renewal ushered in by the ‘new Ireland’, is the harsh reality of capitalist production, exclusionary nationalism and growing xenophobia, in relation to both the state and the general populace. Far from conforming to the Irish Tourist Board ideal of *céad míle fáilte* – one hundred thousand welcomes – the Irish state, both before and, more specifically, since the emergence of the boom economy, has consistently treated non-national immigration as a political problem. This chapter will map the ‘dark side’ of contemporary Irish society by examining briefly the experiences of racism of two groups within the field of migration, namely asylum seekers and non-nationals with work permits.¹

The implementation of stricter border controls and the current rise of racism are not, however, unique to Irish society but mirror – albeit within a different time scale – the earlier development of exclusionary policies and racism in other parts of Europe during and after the mid-1970s. Yet the exclusionary and racist processes within Irish society have assumed a specific configuration unlike that in most other developed nation states. The development of anti-immigrant policies and the increase in racism

have challenged the belief that the colonialism and persistent emigration experienced by the Irish population will automatically engender in them sympathy towards others who are in poverty and are forced to emigrate. Instead, a paranoid belief that Ireland is being overrun by immigrants has become common currency.

The exclusionary processes characterising Irish society, I will argue, may usefully be understood in terms of a tension between three discursive poles:

- 1 a logic of capital accumulation which points towards open borders and the free flow of capital – this imperative has come to the foreground as a consequence of the labour market dynamism of the Celtic Tiger;
- 2 a narrative of ethnic and national identity inherited from the process of state formation before and after independence;
- 3 within the field of international relations, a commitment to constitutional liberalism and the rule of law – this expresses itself in support for the United Nations and the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

Migration in Ireland

The two central pieces of legislation which currently shape Irish immigration policy are the 1996 Refugee Act (which was not fully passed until November 2000) and the Immigration Bill of 1999. These pieces of legislation, however, have only a restricted application, since they cover specific aspects of Irish immigration policy. In fact, the Irish state still lacks an official overarching or coherent immigration policy comparable to that of other European countries. The two principal mechanisms through which ‘third area nationals’² can enter into Ireland are the asylum system and the work permit system.³

Despite a history of restriction on immigration and the predominance of outward migration, it would be mistaken to believe that contemporary asylum seekers and economic migrants are disrupting the contours of an otherwise unitary and homogeneous Irish society. Such notions of homogeneity invariably form a central part of nationalistic state discourses.⁴ The presence of Travellers and Protestants and Black-Irish people bears witness to the fact that Irish society, although relatively homogeneous in terms of whiteness and Christianity, was always more diverse than it claimed to be.⁵ Moreover, a limited, but culturally significant, degree of Jewish immigration at the turn of the century, in addition to the arrival after the 1950s of a number of ‘programme refugees’, including Hungarians, Chileans, Vietnamese and Bosnians, means that the experience and impact

on society of asylum seekers and work permit holders was not unprejudiced.⁶ Although there was and there still is no systematic method of recording racism, many of these groups experienced racism, particularly the Travellers and Jews.⁷

Asylum seekers in Ireland

Immigration into Ireland refers to the arrival not only of people from Africa and Asia, who are predominantly 'people of colour', but also of people from Romania and Poland, as well as from Australia, Canada and the United States. The semantic correlation of non-Irish immigrants with black asylum seekers or refugees is an ideological effect of social relations of domination, specifically those of state and media discourses. Between 1995 and 2000, asylum seekers constituted less than ten per cent of all immigrants who entered Ireland.⁸ Asylum seekers, in addition to being classified according to country of origin or nationality, can be subdivided further in terms of ethnicity, tribal group, caste, gender, age and social class, such that they are far from constituting a homogeneous group. Although exact figures are difficult to calculate, the main countries of origin of asylum seekers seem to be Nigeria, Romania, Moldova and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In 1992, Ireland received only thirty-nine applications for asylum. By 1996, this figure had risen to 1,179; it had risen to 7,724 in 1999 and to 10,325 in 2001 (Figure 4.1). In total, there were approximately 40,000 applications for asylum in Ireland between 1992 and 2001.

As we noted above, such a rise in the number of asylum applications was not peculiar to Ireland but reflected wider trends throughout western Europe, although a significant time lag must be taken into consideration. In absolute terms, Ireland in 2000 received the lowest number of asylum seekers within the European Union (EU), with only 2.4 per cent of the total number of applications. However, while the absolute figures may be low, Ireland does have the fifth highest number of asylum seekers per capita.⁹ Inevitably, the emergence of the Celtic Tiger partly explains the increase in the number of asylum applications in Ireland but other factors are also relevant.¹⁰

In Ireland, there is a dual-track system for determining refugee status: the normal determination procedure, which is based on the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and what is known as the 'manifestly unfounded' procedure. Both procedures embody aspects of institutional racism, that is, patterns of social exclusion persist in the assumptions and principles of the organisations and institutions and how they operate. Since the dominant ethnic group has all the institutions of the state in its control – from the education system to the

Figure 4.1 Annual numbers of asylum applications in Ireland, 1992–2001. (Source: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.)

media and the legal system – and decides how and to whom these resources will be allocated, it also controls issues tied to ethnicity and power.

Such institutional racism is clearly evident in the asylum interview. As a result of institutional bias, not all asylum applications receive a fair and complete hearing. The aim of the interview is to establish the veracity and feasibility of the applicant's claim. In an interview, it is the investigator, as Bourdieu argues, who starts the 'game' and sets up its rules by assigning to 'the interview its objective and use'. This 'asymmetry is reinforced by a social asymmetry since the investigator occupies a higher place in the social hierarchy of different types of capital', including, in this case, cultural and linguistic capital.¹¹ The asylum interview not only entails a large power difference between the interviewer and interviewee, in both social and linguistic terms, but also is driven by the principle of establishing contradictions and minor inconsistencies in the asylum seeker's account, rather than the principle of the 'benefit of the doubt'. The investigator, through the exercise of symbolic violence, therefore wields considerable power in deciding whether the asylum seeker's account 'counts'. Moreover, in contrast to most other EU states, where officers examining asylum seekers have a legal background or university degree, there is no statutory provision relating to the training and skills of these officers. In Ireland, many immigration officers are retired gardaí or former civil servants. In the absence of full training, many of the assessors involved in the determination of asylum claims have little knowledge, understanding or experience in either the field of asylum claims generally or matters pertaining to refugee status, including the human rights situation in the applicant's country of origin.¹² Instead of considering each application for asylum individually and in depth, asylum seekers are collectively framed by both state institutions and the media as a threat,

within a discourse of illegal immigration. In fact, the term 'illegal asylum seeker', as used by the media and increasingly by politicians, is a non sequitur, since all individuals, under international law, are legally entitled to apply for asylum.

The second, 'manifestly unfounded' procedure referred to above was introduced by the Irish government in order to speed up the asylum processing system and to make it more efficient, given the backlog of 12,600 of cases. This dual-track system dates back to developments with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1983, when it was acknowledged that certain categories of claimant could be processed using accelerated determination procedures. Cases to which such provisions could apply were those 'that were so obviously without foundation as not to merit full examination at every level of the procedure'. A 'manifestly unfounded' claim was one that was 'clearly fraudulent', that is, it was a claim which did not warrant being put through accepted United Nations Convention procedures. Since 1999, this procedure has been increasingly used to deal with asylum claims. In 1999, 133 claims out of a total of 7,724 claims were perceived to be manifestly unfounded (1.7 per cent); by 2000, this had increased to 2,263 out of a total of 10,938 claims (18.8 per cent). According to a report by the Irish Refugee Council, such procedures are being used on exceptionally broad grounds, with little basis in natural or constitutional justice or international human rights law.¹³ Asylum applications are unfairly processed both through the normal procedure and, increasingly, through 'manifestly unfounded' procedures. Both procedures reproduce forms of institutional racism in their dealings with asylum applications.

Moreover, mirroring the restrictive practices which developed in Europe in the mid-1990s, the number of asylum seekers granted refugee status relative to the number of applications in Ireland has remained consistently low, as the government's interpretations of what constitutes asylum continually narrows.¹⁴ In 1999, 166 asylum seekers out of 7,724 applicants were granted refugee status at first instance; by the end of 2001, 456 applicants out of 10,325 were granted refugee status. In both absolute and comparative terms, such a recognition rate remains very low, even though this number increased after the appeals stage.¹⁵

In Ireland, asylum seekers are not permitted, before the final determination of their case, to leave the state or to seek or enter into employment nor to carry on any business or to trade.¹⁶ Those asylum seekers who entered Ireland before April 2000 are usually in receipt of full Supplementary Welfare Assistance payments and rent supplementation if they secure private rented accommodation. However, by contrast, asylum seekers who arrived after April 2000 are provided for through a system of dispersal and direct provision. Under this system, asylum seekers are involuntarily housed around the country in hostels, prefabricated buildings

and mobile homes. In contrast to earlier asylum seekers, they receive only €19 per week per adult and €9.50 per week per child, in addition to the provision of fixed meals and basic accommodation.

At the beginning of 2002, there were approximately 5,000 asylum seekers dispersed in eighty-one centres in twenty-four counties.¹⁷ Asylum seekers on direct provision represent the poorest of the poor. With an income which is below twenty per cent of the national household average income, they live in cramped conditions, sometimes with three or four individuals or a family sharing one room, and those living in remote areas in Ireland often have little social and cultural support.¹⁸ However, a large number of dispersed asylum seekers have disappeared from the asylum system. Many are believed to have returned to Dublin and many to be working in the black economy. Overall, notwithstanding the social and juridical division between those arriving before and after the introduction of dispersal and direct provision, asylum seekers have the least entitlement and access to social and material resources of all the groups who live in Irish society. They are the most disempowered group, since they lack the right to work and their access to education and training is severely limited. Their presence marks the nadir of the putative values of the Celtic Tiger: they are marginalised, excluded, poor and, in many respects, they lack freedom.

Economic migration

The second major institutional mechanism for immigration is the work permit/work visa route. As a result of acute labour shortages in the Celtic Tiger economy, work permits and visas began to be issued increasingly often to non-EU migrants.¹⁹ Given the rate of labour market expansion, the government estimated that some 200,000 new workers would be needed by 2006 as part of its National Development Plan. It was envisaged that about half these workers would be returning Irish migrants, one-quarter would be from the European Economic Area (EEA)²⁰ and the remainder would be non-EU workers.²¹

Evidence of such labour shortages was underlined in the Small Firms Association employment survey of 2000. This stated that, of the sixty-nine per cent of companies which had vacancies, ninety-one per cent were unable to fill them. A large source of demand came from unskilled sectors, such as hotels and catering, and other low-grade services, with forty-four per cent of employers in these areas claiming that they could not recruit, primarily as a result of the low rate of pay.²² As the Tánaiste (deputy prime minister), Mary Harney, warned, a failure to address the labour shortage could undermine the Irish Republic's economic growth, since wage rates and the availability of skilled workers remain central

concerns for multinational companies in relation to investment decisions.²³ As a result, work permits, renewable on a yearly basis, were issued to meet labour demands. However, such permits were tied to specific jobs and employers had to demonstrate that it had not been possible to fill the vacancy with indigenous labour or with EEA workers. The holders of work permits were allowed to be joined by family members after one year. In 1993, 1,103 work permits were issued. By the end of the year 2000, this figure had risen to 18,017, and by the end of 2001 it stood at 36,431. Significantly, there were three times as many applications for work permits by non-EU nationals as there were claims for asylum.

In 2001, the majority of the 36,431 permits issued were given to individuals from Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Philippines, South Africa and Romania.²⁴ Most of the countries of origin of the holders of work permits contained white populations, in contrast to the countries of origin of asylum seekers. The Department of Employment and Industry seems implicitly to have targeted specific countries for the recruitment of employees, through work fairs, advertising and so on. Thus, the first international jobs fair conducted by Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), in April 2000, was held in Newfoundland and was swiftly followed by others in London, Berlin, Cologne, Hanover, Manchester, Prague, Birmingham, Cape Town and Johannesburg.²⁵ In 2001, there were also visits to Poland, France, Croatia, Estonia, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, India and, again, Canada and South Africa.²⁶ As a result of this recruitment drive, the majority of permits went to non-African, non-Asian countries (with the exceptions of South Africa and India). These nation states are generally populated by white Christians, who are, from the state's point of view, more easily 'assimilatable' into Irish society.²⁷ This systematic racialisation of work permits by the state can be seen in terms of a straightforward attempt to regulate internal ethnic and religious diversity.²⁸

As a result of continuing labour shortages, business organisations and government bodies such as the National Competitiveness Council and FÁS called for the creation of a fast-track work authorisation visa system. These fast-track visas were introduced specifically to facilitate the recruitment of workers in specialist categories: professionals in information technology and construction, as well as nurses. Work visas are more flexible than work permits in that they allow the recipient to move jobs within a specified sector. Moreover, visas are easier to obtain, since the employer does not have to petition the bureaucratic Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment for a work permit.²⁹ Under the proposal, immigrants could get a work visa from an Irish embassy or consulate abroad, simply by producing a valid job offer from an Irish employer. Unlike work permits, visas are renewable on a two-year basis and allow family reunion in Ireland after three months, depending on the migrant's financial assets. The result is a two-tiered work regime with

different rights for highly skilled visa immigrants, on the one hand, and lower-skilled work permit immigrants, on the other. The top five countries in receipt of the 3,870 work permits issued in the eight months up to the end of August 2001 were the Philippines, India, Russia, Slovakia and Yugoslavia. In contrast, the top five countries for work visas, of which 396 were issued, were South Africa, Australia, the United States, Canada and New Zealand. Significantly, no North African nations appeared in these figures.

Capitalist economic expansion has led to the formation of a dual labour market structure in Ireland's Celtic Tiger, which juxtaposes secure, permanent, highly skilled and well paid jobs, on the one hand, with unskilled, low-paid, insecure jobs, on the other. Specifically, the expansion of highly skilled, well paid computer and information technology work can be contrasted with the expansion in the unskilled services sector. The latter has generally been characterised by difficult, unpleasant and low-paid work. The marked increase in need for office cleaners, dishwashers and fast-food operatives, agricultural workers, factory workers, nurses, builders and waiters and waitresses has meant an increase in vacancies in these areas. Seventy-five per cent of all applicants for work permits in 2000 were for unskilled work,³⁰ with over one-fifth of these permits being for catering jobs.³¹ Such unskilled positions lack a career path and are characterised by wages that fall well below the national average. Whereas, in the past, women and young people had filled these positions, migrant workers, some working in the black economy or illegally, were increasingly taking their places. The economic boom not only led to more women entering employment and thereby creating work for foreign childminders but, in addition, saw the aspirations of indigenous workers rise, so that it became increasingly difficult to fill '3-D' jobs (jobs that are dirty, difficult and dangerous).³²

Another area in the skilled sector in which demand for workers has remained high, especially given its unsuitability for mechanisation, is the health service. The health sector has been estimated to be short of over 1,800 nurses.³³ As a result, a conscious attempt was made by the government to recruit nurses from the Philippines and it was this which partly prompted the introduction of the visa system. The Philippines has been exporting over 3,000 nurses a year.³⁴ In 2000, a staff nurse in Manila could earn approximately \$200 per month, compared with approximately €2,000 a month in Ireland.³⁵

Given the precarious, non-unionised and often illegal status of those employed in the unskilled sector, again reflecting a wider European pattern, exploitation in these areas has been rife.³⁶ Immigrant workers constitute cheap, flexible labour and, because they lack some important social and political rights, also in many cases lack certain economic rights. In 2001, for example, the Labour Inspectorate in the Department

of Enterprise, Trade and Employment examined 108 cases of possible breaches of employment law involving foreign workers.³⁷ These investigations into employment violations included a variety of offences: the employment of migrant workers with unequal pay and conditions in comparison with Irish or EEA staff; failure by employers to pay workers prearranged wage rates; workers being paid below the minimum wage and being subject to excessive working hours; illegal pay deductions, with recruitment costs to be borne by the prospective employee; and the non-payment of overtime or holiday pay.³⁸

The increase in the number of work permits being granted also saw the growth of racism in the workplace.³⁹ However, since many foreign workers were not aware of their legal rights or were afraid that they would be deported or that their work permits would not be renewed, few spoke out against abuse and exploitation – a problem that was often exacerbated by linguistic barriers. Such pervasive exploitation is a consequence of Irish government policy, which has focused on migrant workers largely in terms of economic criteria. Thus, rather than examining the consequences of increased immigration in terms of access to housing, education, health services, transport, social welfare, and civil and political rights, government policy focuses exclusively on the numbers of workers needed to meet the demands of the economy. The increase in work permits has been one method for reducing wage pressure and so clearly benefits business. However, this narrow economic concern has always been mediated by a restricted notion of Irish nationhood, in which the Irish government expects non-EEA workers to return (voluntarily or otherwise) to their country of origin once their labour is no longer needed. Such a standpoint echoes the restrictive policy of other European nation states and effectively denies the reality of long-term trends in immigration.

Despite the differences between those given work permits – described as ‘bonded labour’ – and those holding visas, both lack social and political rights, including access to free education, medical care and social welfare entitlements. Neither group benefits from any holistic integration strategy or even from access to language classes. As a result, asylum seekers and some economic migrants have a great deal in common. They are generally at the bottom end of the socio-economic ladder, share similar racialised disadvantages in terms of housing and educational opportunities, experience low standards of living, poverty and social exclusion, and are equally targets of informal and institutional racism, discrimination and hostility.

Classification and the state

Through legislation and social policy, most European states attempt to define and sanction acceptable types of social behaviour and activity. As

the dominant force in the field of power, which controls the nation and citizenship through legislation, the state actively encourages some forms of social life while downplaying and repressing others. This ability to regulate social life depends in part upon the capacity to sustain and impose categories of thought through which institutions and individuals make sense of the world. This potential to impose what Bourdieu calls a 'vision of divisions' is the 'power of making social divisions and hence the political power *par excellence*'.⁴⁰

An important aspect of this vision of divisions is the way in which individuals are encouraged to identify themselves predominantly in narrow national terms. Processes of nation state formation invariably invoke homogeneous narratives of ethnicity and national identity.⁴¹ In Ireland, this narrative was originally predicated upon the idea of a white Celtic people, defined in opposition to British colonisers. Irishness in this sense leaves no room for non-white, non-Celtic people or for those who cannot participate in its collective historical experience.⁴² National identity is defined by exclusions, which mark its limit. This ideal and undifferentiated 'imagined community', which has been reconfigured in the Celtic Tiger, elides difference and often draws attention away from the material experiences of domination and subordination which are intrinsic to bourgeois society.

The administrative categories and classifications used by the state play an important role in defining broader discourses of identification and exclusion. Both dominant and marginalised groups come to define themselves and each other through such categorisations. In 'imagining' a national community in terms of such categories, the state orchestrates a wider *conscience collective*, which is both descriptive and normative while reflecting and prioritising the values of the dominant class and ethnicity. This conscience collective is a continual object of struggle, since real-life experiences contradict, on a daily basis, the imaginary of national myth.⁴³

The hegemonic sense of Irish identity established during the 1920s and 1930s has been severely challenged by the rise of the Celtic Tiger. The two main pillars and regulators of Irish identity and conservatism since the foundation of the state – the Catholic Church and Fianna Fáil⁴⁴ – have both been partly undermined by economic growth and various media discourses referring to clerical and political scandal.⁴⁵ In addition, the assumption of shared values and experience so central to the Celtic imaginary has been challenged by the recent increase in foreign immigration. Migrants often expose the social and political fault lines of religion, ethnicity, class, gender and culture, which lie beneath the veneer of any 'imagined community', and Ireland is no exception.

The new articulation of nationalism with racism can be understood in terms of this new tension between the re-imagined Irish community of the 1990s, to which corresponds a narrowly conceived sense of ethnic

citizenship, on the one hand, and the reality of increasing social diversity characterising the Ireland of the Celtic Tiger, on the other. It is in this context that we can read the subtext of government policy, both in the ongoing maintenance of a restrictive and exclusionary definition of Irishness as white and Catholic, and also in the overt immigration policies, which are straightforwardly aimed at deterring the entry of non-nationals. The articulation of nationalism with racism also explains the reluctance to advance the structural integration of immigrants in social, political, cultural and economic terms. Here, the process of state categorisation is also important. Through administrative categorisation as 'significant others', those with power and authority (in this case the state) are in a position to impose their definition of an individual and situation, and thus to mould those people's subsequent careers in terms of their identity. As a result, individuals may adjust their identity correspondingly over time. The disempowered often come to see themselves through the eyes of the dominant, as self-images merge with public images:

Dominated agents, who assess the value of their position and their characteristics by applying a system of schemes of perception and appreciation ... tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them ... adjusting their expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order defines them.⁴⁶

Rather than providing all residents with the same civil and political rights, bureaucratic classification schemes engender systematic patterns of discrimination. The legal and administrative categories of 'asylum seeker', 'refugee' and 'economic migrant' are important in that they confer different rights and entitlements. These categorisations have been used by state service providers during the period of the Celtic Tiger as a basis for judgements about individual entitlements to social, political and economic support. In many respects, this discourse of entitlement echoes older distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Thus, both government and media make much of the putative difference between 'genuine' refugees (deserving), of whom there are few, and 'bogus' refugees (undeserving), of whom there are too many. Government statements frequently refer to the way that 'our' welfare regime is attracting 'economic migrants'. For instance, in 1999, John O'Donohue, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, in a speech to the Irish Business and Employers Confederation, argued:

In the early years of this decade and prior to that, our relatively high unemployment rates and low social welfare payments ensured that illegal immigrants invoking the asylum convention targeted the more prosperous countries – even small ones like Denmark and Finland. Let us be clear about it. Our current economic boom is making us a target.⁴⁷

Such speeches often tell us more about the categorisers and how they perceive themselves than they do about the classified. The implication here is that an overly generous and prosperous Ireland, the land of a hundred thousand welcomes, is being systematically abused by unscrupulous asylum seekers. Similarly, a recent statement by a Fianna Fáil TD, Noel O'Flynn, reinforced such a negative view of asylum seekers:

We're against the spongers, the freeloaders, the people screwing the system. Too many are coming to Ireland and too many to Cork in my view ... I'm saying we will have to close the doors. The majority of them are here for economic reasons and they are thumbing their noses up at Irish hospitality and demanding everything under the guise of the Geneva Convention while the taxpayer is paying for it all.⁴⁸

Instead of provoking outrage, such populist rhetoric – which speaks directly to the collective unconscious – earned O'Flynn increased popularity in his Cork North Central constituency, where he topped the pole in the recent general election. Further, this statement was never retracted by O'Flynn, nor were formal sanctions brought against him by the Taoiseach. Such indifference to racist political narrative is part of a broader picture of government inaction. Despite the newly accumulated wealth and the move towards cultural renewal which have come to symbolise contemporary Ireland, the government has failed to take any systematic stance against racism. A failed awareness campaign has been matched by the failure to establish an independent body to monitor racism, or to introduce legislation to protect individuals from racist crimes, or to introduce comprehensive anti-racism instruction as part of education and public service training.

Historically, Ireland has experienced both colonialism and economic hardship. Many Irish citizens travelled to the United States and worked illegally while their regularisation was formally sought.⁴⁹ Given the significance of these events, it may have been expected that the Irish government would show sympathy to others who have suffered hardship. However, instead of treating immigrants, including asylum seekers and economic migrants, within a generous humanitarian framework which recognises the global nature of both political persecution and poverty, foreign immigrants coming to Ireland have been judged solely according to an economic cost–benefit criterion. As Sayad notes, from the point of view of the state and the economy, immigration and the immigrant have no meaning and *raison d'être* unless they 'bring in' more than they 'cost'.⁵⁰ The question facing policy makers is how to maximise the 'profits' (primarily economic) while minimising the 'costs' (economic, but also social, cultural and national). However, as Sayad rightly points out, the very accounting conventions which determine what is 'cost' and what is 'benefit' are loaded and systematically underplay the positive gains associated with

immigration. For instance, these conventions emphasise the monetary transfers associated with welfare payments but rarely quantify the impact of savings transfers into the economy from abroad. More generally, they obscure the point that immigrants actually create more jobs than they take and are likely to pay more in taxes than they receive in welfare.⁵¹

Racism in Ireland

It is in relation to these state practices that we need to understand racism. Racism can be broadly defined as any belief or practice which attributes negative characteristics to any group or persons either intentionally or unintentionally, on the basis of their supposed 'race' or ethnicity, within the context of differential relations of power.⁵² Despite Ireland's image as a welcoming, hospitable nation and its unparalleled economic boom, many members of black and ethnic minority groups have experienced racism since arriving in Ireland. In a recent Amnesty International survey, seventy-nine per cent of individuals from black or ethnic minority groups living in Ireland claimed they had experienced some form of racism or discrimination.⁵³ Moreover, many of these racist attacks were not one-off or incidental occurrences. When asked how often they had received insulting comments, 36.2 per cent of respondents stated that this had occurred 'frequently' and 32.3 per cent said that it had occurred 'occasionally'. The overwhelming majority of these racist incidents took place in public spaces. Over forty-four per cent of the experiences of racist abuse took place on the street, twenty-four per cent in shops and twenty-three per cent in pubs. For black and ethnic minorities, such abuse was a feature of everyday life and occurred in a multiplicity of social situations: in pubs, from neighbours, in banks, on buses and taxis, with regard to housing, at school and even at the cinema. Notwithstanding the fact that these statistics are geographically and contextually dependent, the high proportion of racist incidents experienced at the hands of the gardaí (twenty-five per cent) and employers (twenty per cent) is a particular cause for concern, since both groups hold a significant degree of power within Irish society. Such statistics underline the fact that, despite economic growth and cultural and political liberalisation, racism is steadily becoming an endemic feature of Irish society.

The economic boom has had massive social, political and cultural repercussions for Irish society, including the realignment of notions of ethnicity and class. With the creation of almost half a million new jobs since 1990, and the reversal of historical patterns of emigration, the Celtic Tiger signifies an emphatic shift in the context for the reception and integration of would-be immigrants. At the same time, however, there has been a dramatic increase in wealth inequality and a similar

expansion at the lower end of the labour market in low-paid, insecure and part-time service jobs, often in the informal economy. As a result, poverty levels have increased dramatically. The growing gap between rich and poor has also been reflected in other social processes, for instance the emergence of a two-tier health system and growing numbers of homeless people. Government policy with respect to taxation and the wage restraint agreements negotiated under the rubric of 'Partnership 2000' have seen corporate profits rise while the poorest have slipped further behind.⁵⁴ It is important, therefore, to acknowledge, in opposition to the liberal view of a society composed of sovereign individuals, a more radical view which emphasises the importance of racialisation within a context of broader cultural and economic differences in power and social domination.⁵⁵

The recent development of contemporary Irish society is inherently paradoxical. At the same time as producing unprecedented wealth, it has created poverty and social exclusion. It is largely, although not exclusively, by reference to this paradox that we can attempt to understand the growth of racism in Ireland. Although racism may take the form of a relatively coherent theory, it can also appear in the form of a less coherent assembly of stereotypes, images and attributions, and as an explanation that is constructed and employed by individuals to negotiate their everyday lives. As Miles notes, racism can be characterised as practically adequate, in the sense that it refracts, in thought, certain observed regularities in the social world and constructs a causal interpretation which is presented as consistent with those regularities.⁵⁶ Such images and stereotypes rarely emerge spontaneously and often arise from state and media discourses, given their monopoly over the powers of governance, diffusion and representation. Thus, refugees in Ireland, and Europe generally, are often represented as being responsible for a number of social and economic problems (which usually existed well before their arrival), such as housing shortages, unemployment and the general lack of adequate statutory provisions. For many disempowered sections of the population, racist discourses often constitute a description of, and explanation for, the world they experience on a day-to-day basis. Racist discourse is an ideological account of the social world which recognises and offers an explanation for the housing crisis, for the lack of jobs, for the continuance of poverty – experiences which many marginalised groups face. As a correlate of racialisation, racism therefore serves to make a causal link between observed, material differences in Irish society and signified phenotypical and cultural differences of black and ethnic minorities. It helps to make sense of the economic and social changes accompanying poverty, urban decline and social exclusion, as they are experienced by sections of the working class within the context of a booming Celtic Tiger economy.

In a study carried out by Amnesty International in 2002, forty-four per cent of respondents believed that asylum seekers were depriving indigenous Irish people of local authority housing, ninety-five per cent believed that some asylum seekers were in Ireland illegally and fifteen per cent believed that asylum seekers could obtain grants to buy cars, while ten per cent believed that they were given free mobile phones.⁵⁷

In research carried out by the Irish Refugee Council, many asylum seekers referred to the hostility they encountered from other excluded and marginalised groups.⁵⁸ It was felt that such indigenous excluded groups often perceived asylum seekers and refugees as welfare scroungers, or as preventing them from receiving certain scarce social resources:

I think Irish people ... are racist people but I think the racist people are from Ireland's cities, the people who are getting Social Welfare. I really think that educated people are not racist ... even if in their roots they have some racism they learn to control it or they learn what it is to be racist.⁵⁹

In inner city areas these people are thinking that refugees and asylum seekers are their competitors, or in competition with them.⁶⁰

Such explicit, potentially violent hostility concurs with 'popular' definitions of racism as well as those definitions used by the media and government. However, such a view occludes the more silent but equally pernicious forms of institutional racism which also operate through state organisations. And, of course, asylum seekers are more likely to encounter such overt racial hostility from inner-city working-class communities because of their similar social and geographical position.

Yet, it is important not to oversimplify or homogenise the causes of racism in Irish society. Processes of racialisation and racism are heterogeneous, contradictory and uneven, and cannot simply be reduced to a consequence of the practices of state, media and capital. The argument that is proposed here is merely that these practices have been particularly important in understanding *some* forms of racism which have emerged in modern Irish society. Other sites where racism operates and is reproduced also need to be acknowledged. These include playgrounds, streets, classrooms, hospitals and the workplace. As Rattansi argues, such sites often embody racialised power relations which are tied to various power/knowledge configurations.⁶¹ However, in contrast to many postmodern approaches – which, often reflecting the position of their advocates in social space, tend to concentrate on the concepts of difference and 'other' to explain nationalism and racism – the importance of the state and the economy should not be downplayed.⁶² Such postmodern standpoints often disarticulate the social and economic conditions of the emergence of forms of signification and racialisation. As Hall notes, however:

the question is not whether men-in-general make perceptual distinctions between groups with different racial or ethnic characteristics, but rather, what are the specific conditions which make this form of distinction socially pertinent, historically active.⁶³

Signification of 'otherness', as a basis for racialisation and racism, can have effect and meaning only within determinate economic and political relations of social domination. Language as a practice, as Wittgenstein rightly notes, is always embedded in other, broader practices or forms of life.⁶⁴

Conclusions

It was argued earlier that it is impossible to understand racism in contemporary Ireland without making some reference to the Celtic Tiger. On an ideological level, the Celtic Tiger has come not only to characterise Ireland's unprecedented economic boom and a new-found confidence in the arts but also to represent an endorsement of liberal values, including cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, as well as a commodified international image of tourist friendliness, hospitality and openness. The underlying reality, however, remains starkly different. Rapid economic growth has created a structural tension between the logic of capital accumulation and that of political nationalism. The 'imagined community' which emerged during the early years of the Republic embodied a highly restricted notion of citizenship and ethnicity which, despite undergoing significant modification during the economic boom, have remained essentially exclusionary. Since the foundation of the state, Irishness and citizenship have been correlated with whiteness and Catholicism, both of which implicitly acted as the measure against which difference was constructed.⁶⁵ However, this restricted, hegemonic view of 'Irishness' is now coming into conflict with the labour market imperatives of the increasingly globalised Tiger economy. Hence, there is a need for immigrant labour, yet at the same time a racialisation of that labour. The free movement of people has not matched the free and accelerating movement of goods and capital across national borders. Despite the acute labour needs of the Irish economy, the Irish government has remained stringent with regard to the entry of non-nationals, as is witnessed by the low number of asylum seekers who have actually been granted refugee status and the racialisation of those given work permits. To this tension between historic nationalism and the contemporary economic revival can be added the issue of Irish constitutional liberalism. As a small state with a history of neutrality and a commitment to democracy and to the international rule of law, and coloured by its own experience of colonial oppression, Ireland has always voiced strong support for the

United Nations, and, specifically, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, although this support was often more in terms of image than substance. Since the emergence of the Celtic Tiger, the Irish state has increasingly interpreted international protocols and legislation relating to migration in an illiberal spirit. In addition, it has failed to adopt a number of international laws relating to human rights and racism. This liberal internationalism further complicates the political response to what is, for Ireland, the new problem of immigration.⁶⁶ Here we see the overdetermination⁶⁷ of a structural contradiction between, on the one hand, nationalism – closed, Janus-faced, insular, selective, discriminating and particular – and, on the other, capitalism – open, expansionary, indiscriminate, global and universal.

In order to have any purchase in this context, antiracist struggles will have to be carried out at a number of different levels. Exclusionary forms of nationalism cannot be simply replaced by anodyne notions of multiculturalism or by calls for more inclusive forms of national identity, which leave unequal forms of power in place. Nor can material shifts towards economic equality through the challenging of private property be secured without major ideological shifts which relate to classification, social recognition and the valorisation of difference. These remain the fundamental challenges for Irish society as the Celtic Tiger, coming under increasing pressure, continues to throw up new social and economic problems.

I would like to thank Alice Feldman, Stephen Quilley, Louise Campbell and Colin Coulter for their very helpful comments on this chapter.

Notes

- 1 As a result of the limited focus of this chapter, it needs to be constantly borne in mind that the word ‘immigrant’, which has come to stand for black and minority groups, is a much broader concept and its conflation with blacks, and more recently with refugees, is the effect of ideological and political processes instituted by political and media discourses. To that extent, this chapter, by concentrating largely on black and ethnic groups, reproduces this ideological correlation.
- 2 That is, nationals not born in Ireland or a member state of the European Economic Area.
- 3 Other methods of entry include student visas and tourist visas.
- 4 C. Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Open University Press, 1997).
- 5 B. Rolston and M. Shannon, *Encounters: How Racism Came to Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2002).
- 6 ‘Programme refugees’ differ from ‘Convention refugees’ in that they are invited by the government in groups.
- 7 E. Ward, “‘A big show-off to show what we could do’ – Ireland and the Hungarian refugee crisis of 1956”, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 7

- (1996), pp. 131–41; D. Keogh, *The Jews in Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998); K. Goldstone, “‘Benevolent helpfulness?’ – Ireland and the international reaction to Jewish refugees 1933–9”, in M. Kennedy and J. M. Skelly (eds), *Irish Foreign Policy 1919–1966* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).
- 8 P. MacÉinrí, ‘Immigration policy in Ireland’, in F. Farrell and P. Watt (eds), *Responding to Racism* (Dublin: Veritas, 2001), p. 56.
 - 9 P. Faugnan and M. Woods, *Lives on Hold: Seeking Asylum in Ireland* (Dublin: Social Science Research Council, 2000); Comhlámh Refugee Solidarity Group, *Refugee Lives* (Dublin: Comhlámh, 2001). In contrast, the United Kingdom received 21.6 per cent of all European applications and Germany 17.4 per cent.
 - 10 These include the role of traffickers and European refugee policies generally, especially those in the United Kingdom, which have had repercussions on the situation in Ireland.
 - 11 P. Bourdieu (ed.), *The Weight of the World* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 609.
 - 12 L. Almirall and N. Lawton, *Asylum in Ireland: A Report on the Fairness and Sustainability of Asylum Determinations at First Instance* (Dublin: Irish Refugee Council, 2000), p. 24.
 - 13 S. Mullally, *Manifestly Unjust: A Report on the Fairness and Sustainability of Accelerated Procedures for Asylum Determinations* (Dublin: Irish Refugee Council, 2001).
 - 14 The usual distinction between asylum seekers and refugees will be used throughout this chapter. According to the 1996 Refugee Act, an asylum seeker is a ‘person who, owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality or, owing to such a fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country’. By contrast, refugees are asylum seekers who have successfully fulfilled these requirements as stipulated in the 1951 United Nations Convention and are thereby (usually) entitled to full citizenship rights.
 - 15 Moreover, many asylum seekers were also given humanitarian leave to remain. In 2000, this figure stood at 2,473.
 - 16 The exception here is a select number of asylum seekers who were given the right to work. Asylum seekers who had made their applications in Ireland at least twelve months before 27 July 1999, as well as those who had applied for asylum in Ireland on or before 27 July 1999 and had been in the state for twelve months, were all given the right to work. As a result, an estimated 3,500 asylum seekers were permitted to work.
 - 17 Department of Justice, 24 March 2002; B. Fanning, S. Loyal and C. Staunton, *Asylum Seekers and the Right to Work in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Refugee Council, 2000).
 - 18 B. Fanning, A. Veale and D. O’Connor, *Beyond the Pale: Asylum Seeking Children and Social Exclusion in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Refugee Council, 2001).
 - 19 Employers who apply for work permits are generally required to establish that it has not been possible, in spite of reasonable efforts being made, to fill the vacancy with an Irish or other person for whom a work permit is not required. A permit is granted when the employer has no alternative but to employ a non-EEA national. For more detailed information, see *Changes to Work Permit Requirements in Ireland: Information Note*, available from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

- 20 The EEA includes the fifteen states in the EU, plus the members of the European Free Trade Association, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.
- 21 *Irish Times*, 22 January 2001.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *Irish Times*, 22 December 2000.
- 24 The top countries granted work permits were as follows: Latvia, 4,355; Lithuania, 2,907; Poland, 2,490; Philippines, 2,471; South Africa, 2,031; Romania, 1,572; Czech Republic, 1,454; Russian Federation, 1,440; Ukraine, 1,331.
- 25 FÁS (Foras Áiseanna Saothair) is the labour development authority in Ireland and provides job placements for workers.
- 26 *Irish Times*, 22 December 2000.
- 27 The one exception to this was the Philippines, although it should be noted that between eighty and ninety per cent of Philipinos are Catholic.
- 28 Thanks to T. Ward for this information.
- 29 However, following signs of an economic downturn, the Taoiseach has re-emphasised the need for Irish industry to employ Irish workers before seeking to recruit non-EU workers (see *Irish Times*, 23 November 2001). In addition, the policy requiring employers to prove that an Irish person (or other EEA national) was not available for a job instead of a non-EEA migrant has been strengthened. Annual work permit fees, as a disincentive, have also been increased, from €159 to €400.
- 30 *Irish Times*, 5 July 2001.
- 31 *Irish Times*, 23 December 2000.
- 32 In the skilled employment sector, the effect of skilled migrants leaving the country of origin to seek work abroad has thrown up issues relating to 'brain drain' and the continued economic exploitation of developing societies by more economically developed ones.
- 33 *Irish Times*, 3 March 2000.
- 34 P. Stalker, *No-Nonsense Guide to Immigration* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 26.
- 35 *Irish Times*, 17 April 2000.
- 36 *Irish Times*, 7 July 2001.
- 37 *Irish Times*, 8 June 2001. Of 108, thirty-three involved foreign workers in the hotel and catering sector, twenty-four in agriculture sector, sixteen in nursing and nine in the retail sector.
- 38 The extensive exploitation of migrant workers is not a phenomenon peculiar to Ireland but increasingly reflects global practices. Hence, in South Korea in 1999, workers from China, Thailand and Pakistan employed officially on public work programmes were paid only forty-five to seventy-six per cent of what Korean workers were paid. In Hong Kong in 2000, Chinese workers from the mainland were paid \$8 a day for unloading vegetables when the average daily pay for Hong Kong residents was \$28 for day labour. Stalker, *No-Nonsense Guide to Immigration*, pp. 26–7.
- 39 *Report of the Equality Authority* (Dublin: Government Publications, 2001).
- 40 P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 468.
- 41 A. Smith, *National Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991); E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 42 This is not to say that Irish nationalism has not changed. Nationalism is ever in the process of being reproduced and, as such, must inflect broader social and political transformations. For this reason, one should be wary of

- equating the peculiar exclusionary doctrines of the newly born Irish state of the 1930s with contemporary discourses of nationalist governance and moral regulation, which have emerged in relation to very different economic and social problems.
- 43 P. Corrigan and D. Sayer, *The Great Arch: State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).
- 44 K. Allen, *The Celtic Tiger: The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
- 45 T. Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998).
- 46 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 471.
- 47 John O'Donohue, speech to the Irish Business and Employers Confederation, Dublin, September 1999.
- 48 *Irish Times*, 29 January 2002.
- 49 M. Corcoran, 'Clandestine destinies: the informal economic sector and Irish immigrant incorporation', in J. MacLaughlin (ed.), *Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), pp. 236–52.
- 50 A. Sayad, '“Costs” and “benefits” of immigration', in P. Bourdieu *et al.* (eds), *The Weight of the World* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).
- 51 Stalker, *No-Nonsense Guide to Immigration*.
- 52 Under this broad definition, racism is being used here only as a generic or class concept. That is, it signifies what particular social actions and practices may, loosely, have in common. Racism, as such, does not exist *per se* but exists only in its empirical instantiations, which we must identify on a shifting social and historical basis. Racism can also be broadly seen as a form of 'exclusionary practice', which occurs when a specified group is shown to be in unequal receipt of resources and services. However, in order to avoid the interrelated dangers of supposing that the explanation for disadvantage is mono-causal and that the disadvantaged position of 'refugees' is necessarily consequent upon racialisation, it should be assumed that exclusionary practices have a number of determinants, which refract and reinforce one another.
- 53 E. O'Mahony, S. Loyal and A. Mulcahy, *Racism in Ireland: The Views of Black and Ethnic Minorities* (Dublin: Amnesty International, 2001).
- 54 Allen, *The Celtic Tiger*.
- 55 As Marx states in the *Grundrisse*: 'This so called consideration from the point of view of society means nothing more than to overlook precisely the differences which express the social relation (relation to civil society). Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of the relationships and conditions in which these individuals stand to one another. As if someone were to say: for society slaves and citizens do not exist: both are men. They are both men, if we consider them outside society. To be a slave and to be a citizen are social determinations, relations between human beings A and B. Human being A as such is not a slave: he is a slave in and through society'. K. Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (M. Nicolaus, trans.) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993).
- 56 R. Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- 57 Opinion poll for Amnesty International (Dublin: Lansdowne Marketing Research, April 2002).
- 58 Fanning *et al.*, *Asylum Seekers and the Right to Work in Ireland*.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

- 61 A. Rattansi, 'Just framing: ethnicities and racisms in a "postmodern" framework', in L. Nicholson (ed.), *Social Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 262.
- 62 See P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990) for a discussion of the academic tendency to privilege the symbolic.
- 63 S. Hall, 'Race, articulation and societies structured in dominance', in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), p. 338.
- 64 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957).
- 65 D. Haraway, *Primate Visions* (London: Verso, 1992).
- 66 However, the gap between the appearance of international constitutional acceptance and the reality of policy is also evident. See the treatment of the Hungarian programme refugees in Ward, "A big show-off to show what we could do".
- 67 L. Althusser, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 1974).