

# What Do We Mean When We Say ‘Integration’?<sup>1</sup>

Gavan Titley, Clement Esebamen, Robin Hanan, and Issah Huseini

## Introduction by Gavan Titley

‘What do we mean when we say integration?’ It is obvious that discussing integration in the way it has been dealt with in Irish political discourse over the last number of years, without recourse to a more general discussion about what a state of integrated-ness is in social, political or economic terms, has been somewhat absurd. But the very fact that many of the cultural myths of the last decade are disintegrating around us makes this a particularly useful time to have a discussion of integration as it is seen in relation to migrants, but also in relation to more general and resurgent discussions about what makes a good society or what an integrated society might actually be.

In Irish political discourse over the last number of years integration has come to be defined as a good thing. However, it is not very often that we hear discussions about what constitutes a state of integration, that we hear discussions about what different modalities of social, economic, political and cultural life are deemed to be integrated or disintegrated, or indeed how people who migrate experience integrated-ness, and how as Ghassan Hage points out they might define it in ways that elude official discourse and official definition. One of the problems that we could get into is that talking about integration in Ireland has been heavily influenced by a very stylized narrative consistent with post-multicultural politics in Western Europe, where integration has been seen as a state that has to be restored after a failed experiment in multiculturalism. It leads to fragmentation over social cohesion, which led to cultural relativism over national and liberal values (rarely defined but often stated). A range of discourses on citizenship ranging from civic to very culturalist manifestations are currently in vogue, and discussions of European and national identity tend to snake in and out of each other. All of these discussions in various Western European countries currently cycle around measures of integration, or how integration can be recognized and how integration can be achieved. Some of these measures are very technocratic, some of them overtly racializing.

This is the point at which we enter into these discussions. And, it is a good time to take a step back and ask: ‘What is it that we mean when we say integration?’

**Clement Esebamen**

I think it’s really unfair to ask a profound question like, ‘What do we mean when we say integration?’ but I will try to answer personally and also talk about a social vision of where I think integration should lead. To start from that, I’m African, I’m originally from Nigeria, and I’ve been here for nearly ten years. I’m an Irish and a Nigerian citizen. So how do I become fully integrated in this society? My reference point is people who have migrated to Europe before me, the outcomes for them and their families, and the position they find themselves in society, whether it be remaining on the bottom of the heap of society in terms of where they live, or whether their children are achieving in different areas of endeavour. Those are the kinds of pointers to me about where the possibilities are.

In Africa we talk about the day being pregnant; pregnancy is one of the ways we visualize things in Africa, simply because we talked about all those kinds of things without the possibility of scanners and the modern technology where you can actually see what’s in the body now, before the child is actually born. In Africa we think of pregnancy as the great unknown. What could come out of this? It’s all a big mystery. These sayings of my people were handed down over generations, because poor people ascribe to the unknown. But integration is not the unknown. We’ve seen the outcome of migration to Europe since the end of the Second World War, whether in Germany or post-colonial France, or even Britain next door to ourselves. And, generally, and I know this from immigrants themselves, they don’t like the state of affairs. Everybody is looking around, fretting, about what they see. I’m also worried about the outcome for children.

The first generation always has high hopes for themselves and if they have a family they think about progress from that perspective. For a refugee or for an economic migrant you are coming here to find a better life. The idea of a better life is probably something that people might debate, but for many people the better life was glimpsed in their country of origin, popularized by globalized television and popular culture, where the good things in life – higher education, good jobs, prosperity basically – is what makes a lot of people migrate. Of course danger is also a reason for migration, and danger and poverty tend to live side by side.

When I think about integration I think about possibilities. I want my children to compete on par,

even to do better. The whole idea of 'better' is what propels migration, and I think that is the crux of the matter. Integration is a question of what will you be integrated into. Politically or technically? They are just measures. The real issue is being able to stand shoulder to shoulder with my neighbour, whether they are Irish or Polish, without any feeling of inferiority, not being pitied and not being ignored by the state.

One of the things I have seen across Europe is the lack of engagement by the state in the process of integration. The lack of state engagement in the business, if you like, of immigrants becoming productive citizens of the countries in which they live. I think this is what needs to be talked about: how does the state engage more fully in this enterprise, changing its systems in ways that can guarantee a better future for the people within the state? What has come now is integration seen as an afterthought: what can we do now to remedy an already bad situation? And in Ireland we have not gone to that threshold yet, but we are getting there. In Ireland the whole situation with immigrants is beginning to feel as though we need to take urgent steps, strategic steps, to enable a systemic response to the issues that concern immigrants and also the barriers that prevent them from gaining a foothold and progressing.

I'll stop there for now ...

### **Robin Hanan**

I think when we were asked this question we all knew it's one of those questions that is very easy to answer and very difficult to understand.

At the simplest level, integration can be defined as the ability to function in a society and the opportunities to participate, to take part, in that society. What that means, of course, is far more complex. The first question, which Clement briefly raised, is what are people being asked to integrate into? The very word integration implies people coming into a society, finding their way around a society, becoming part of a society, and the question is this: what exactly is it that we are asking people coming from other cultures to integrate into?

The Ireland that we are living in now – and this has become something of a cliché – is very, very different from the Ireland that I grew up in, and it is very different in a lot of different ways. It's different, for example, in the ways in which we define a national culture. When I was growing up there was no question in people's minds that being part of Ireland meant being part of a national culture which was shared at least within the twenty-six counties and probably by a large part of the thirty-two counties and was defined as being relatively self-contained and different from other societies. The former TD Oliver J. Flannigan once remarked that there was no sex in Ireland before the TV in order to point out that we were living in a society in which influences from the outside world

were relatively limited. I think that the Ireland that I grew up in was narrower culturally than the world that James Joyce described a century ago in terms of contact with other parts of Europe or contact with influences from outside Europe.

I think that people in Ireland now are connected to a whole range of different cultures and different ways of thinking, and not just sub-cultures within Ireland, rather many people in this country now work for multinationals and move from country to country; people study in different countries; colleges are far more mixed. My own children grew up as honorary Californians as they watched television in Ireland. These cultural influences have changed the very nature of the society in which we are having this discussion about integration, and yet the discussion at a political level goes on as if there can be some sort of imperative put on immigrants to integrate, to learn about Irish history, to know who Eamon de Valera was, or Michael Collins, to know a little of the Irish language, to know a little bit about who James Joyce was now that we don't ban him any more, in other words it is as if we were talking about a static society.

The other great myth about integration is that we have to choose between assimilation and inter-culturalism. That an individual coming to this country has to choose either to remain totally within the culture they come from or to become totally Irish in a stereotypical way. Again, we know from dealing with people in their everyday lives that most people have a whole range of identities. We just can't keep thinking that all the Yoruba, for example, come from the same place, have the same identity, think in the same ways and that they are now confronting a society called Ireland and that they need to adapt to it.

For many immigrants to Ireland – I live in Bray for example, where there's the Dell plant, Microsoft and a number of other multinational offices – a relatively cocooned life is possible, where French, Italian and Polish are spoken nearly as widely as English. Those immigrants often depart quiet quickly. Other people arrive in working class areas and immediately have to navigate shops, job hunting, schools, sometimes working with a more traditional Irish society. The debate in Ireland, particularly over the last year, but becoming louder since the recession started, works from the assumption that Ireland is facing into a crisis if we cannot promote this thing called integration. Integration at its best means the ability to participate in society, but we need to further define it at a whole lot of levels. It is not just about understanding the Irish political system – which most people who grew up in this country still haven't quiet got a grasp of – it is not just about learning about a particular historical context, it is about finding and contributing to the type of globalized and international society which most of us now live in.

My first thought is that the debate about integration, assimilation or interculturalism tends to deal very much in stereotypes. And when we move outside the universities, the NGOs and the government

departments the debate becomes even more simplistic. I constantly hear the term non-national. 'There are non-nationals dealing drugs here'; 'Some of the non-nationals are quiet nice'; 'Some non-nationals drink in our pub'. So, not only are we asking people to fit into a single cultural stereotype of where they come from, but in popular discourse everyone from outside the country is treated as having something in common, something more in common with each other than they have with Irish society. It's very common to have the kind of experience I had in my own town of Bray when setting up a small refugee support group to build contact between the local community and the new refugee communities. At a meeting, one of the participants put a female Nigerian speaker under enormous pressure to explain Roma culture – who were all these Roma coming here from Eastern Europe? And I had to explain several times that the Roma were Europeans like myself and the person asking the question and not 'foreigners' from the outside that a person from Nigeria should be expected to understand and empathize with.

I think that the first thing to bear in mind is that the debate itself is very artificial. It's based on the idea that people only have a single cultural identity, that someone from India only has two available cultural identities, Indian and Irish. We know that that person may have many identities and allegiances in terms of culture and interests and in terms of their work and so on.

I also think that we need to guard against the very dangerous public debate that assumes that any sign of conflict that involves non-Europeans in a European city is a result of a lack of integration. I find myself in a lot of conversations in which people say, 'We must learn from France. They're had riots there. It's all because they didn't integrate.' As I'm sure a lot of people will know France is a country that puts an enormous pressure on immigrants to assimilate into French culture, to think in French ways and to become French citizens. The type of riots which we've seen in France in recent times are much more about disadvantage, much more about exclusion, and much more about discrimination. Consider two very obvious examples: during the Thatcher years one of the iconic images of racial division in the UK were the Brixton riots, where largely African and Caribbean second and third generation citizens were fighting with the police; one of the iconic images of integration, within a year, was the poll tax riots where you had an enormous mixture of people from different races and disadvantaged places throwing things at the same police. Both of these events were described in very different ways in the media but both came from very similar contexts of exclusion.

In opening up, I have said that the question is a dangerous one and one we have to think about very carefully. In the area I work, with refugees, people are coming to this country traumatized, looking for protection and claiming the right to protection but will be put under pressure to prove that they're integrated. One sees this especially in the new *Immigration, Residency and Protection Bill* where there are clauses

that will put people under this kind of pressure. This is something Garibaldi didn't have to prove when he lived in Britain in the nineteenth century; it's something that the Fenians didn't have to prove when they lived in other countries. The right to protection is absolute and should never be dependant on very artificial tests of integration. There is also the danger that what are often put across as citizenship or integration tests – these have been on and off the public agenda here – will lead to greater divisions between people.

### Issah Huseini

What do we mean by integration, or what is our understanding of integration? As someone working on the ground, at the grassroots level, I don't think there is any definition, so I just want to give some practical sense based on what I have seen over the past few years while I have been working for the New Communities Partnership. I have been thinking about this for the past year since the economic downturn began and I have been asked what is happening within the migrant communities. Well I always start by saying, 'That depends on the legal status of the migrant.' There are some migrants who are entitled to state support and there are other migrants who don't get anything, notwithstanding the number of years that they have lived in the country. There are some groups for whom the whole concept of integration looks like a luxury, because it is not a priority: it's not what they are concerned about. Again, it depends on the groups, but the first priority of many immigrants is to establish their legal status. For most people, that's the first step. It's not about integration; it's about how secure are they in their legal or residential status in the country. This requires, we all know, an efficient and transparent immigration regime; it will require people in the country not being stigmatized because of how they came into the country.

The next step for many, based on my experiences, is that after they get their legal status people want to establish their own private space within the host community, often by linking with other people from their own home country, to provide support for each other for family events, to support each other to navigate the system, or in getting a job. Because of all of this, there is a desire to link with people from their own country in order to get a space where they can get advice and this is why there are a lot of home culture associations spreading.

I'll just give you an example of what happened to me yesterday. I live in Edwardstown and my car broke down and I had to go to Dublin. I was going by train, but I still needed the car to be fixed. I come from Ghana and belong to the local Ghana Association, so I took the car to a friend from Ghana who will give me a good deal and fix it for me while I'm in Dublin. It's things like this that help to build a common space where people can protect each other and support each other. And it's after this stage has been reached that

people look to connecting into the wider community, when they are more confident and want to engage as equals within the system, and be able to make a contribution as equals.

But the biggest danger for me is how policy as a whole sees the integration process. There are those who believe you have to play Gaelic games before you can say you are integrated. I remember asking someone in Dublin once, 'How do I integrate?' and he said, 'Go to the Pub!'

### Gavan Titley

Clement talked about a vision of equality, of generational possibility and of people starting on the same level playing field. Robin talked about the fact that while we may perceive a need for these debates integration is always seen through our culturalized lens, and part of that is the pressure on people to show themselves to be integrated, and perform being integrated in ways which are sometimes fantastical but are nevertheless quite powerful politically and socially. Issah spoke about the idea that integration debates represent a luxury for many people when it comes to questions of security or one's own life or one's own network, which, though necessary, are also recognized as signs of dis-integratedness – and we're all familiar with debates about ghettoization, for example. But attention must also be given to other ways in which integration is recognized in political debate.

### From the floor ...

I think all three speakers were uncomfortable with the question, 'What do we mean when we say integration?' On one level, everyone has said, 'This is more complicated'. But there's the other level at which integration is being talked about across Europe where it's less about what integration means and how it can be modelled and more about how it's becoming problematized, being made into a problem. Perhaps I could hear comments on that.

I also have another question. In a recent event organized by the Anthropology Department in Maynooth Gareth Fitzgerald echoed Michael McDowell when he said that really there hasn't been any issues around integration. Michael McDowell writes about this in *The Soul of Ireland*, that somehow the Irish example is different, that somehow we 'managed migration'. Here everyone is saying that this is not quiet true. So I'd like to know more about the problematization of integration – where the flashpoints are going to be in debates going forward?

### Clement Esebamen

What has happened in the last ten or twelve years in Ireland? Well it's been pretty obvious that we have been riding on the back of a very famous animal, and now that Celtic Tiger is taking us in new directions.

If there were any bumps on the road the economic prosperity basically smoothed the bumps and corners. I lived for several years in a poor area of Dublin and the changes in that area in that time were just short of miraculous. People became very confident about who they were; people took two or three holidays a year – I don't know how they managed it but they did – and the early apprehension about the Somali family moving into the neighbourhood vanished into the air: it was no problem.

The interesting thing I noticed about community cohesion was the Nigerian woman bringing her kids out to the bus stop to go to school about 7.30am and the woman across the street shouting to her kids, 'Look at the black people across the street, and you are still hear! Get out and go to school!' It was amazing, in neighbourhoods that didn't place a high value on school, attendance really shot up. It wasn't the only reason, but people said it to me: those black people are putting pressure on us, now we have to do it. That was eight or nine years ago, and now there is a full cycle of children that have gone through school.

But the flashpoints in other countries have been around a lack of cohesion. If we say the communities are divided or that there are ghettos forming, like the banlieues of France or in Bradford, then we are talking about the division between the natives and the immigrants, where they are concentrated in large numbers. In working class areas the differences in advancement or attainment might not be too different but the differences of race or ethnicity or nationality brings these divides to the fore. This is the crux of the issue: the fragmentation, the divisions and the differences are heightened when there is competition, be it housing or entitlements or social welfare. Where there might not be jobs ... that is where the challenges are going to come from.

In some ways I agree with Dr Fitzgerald that we have had a society that has been receptive to large-scale migration. The numbers of people who came into Ireland, whether they stayed or left, the footfall could be around one million people in the last few years. The issues around multiculturalism and integration have been challenging to some people, but that challenge has been masked by the high level of economic activity and the economic prosperity.

### Gavan Titley

And it is in this same period of high prosperity that the state has on the one hand encouraged cultural diversity and on the other hand engaged in really flagrant crisis racism, for example with the Citizenship Referendum. So we also need to bring in state-level activity ...

### From the floor ...

Two things, really. I'm a migrant from the USA in Ireland for the past 15 years, and the American experience is often held up, imagined as a migrant country, mosaic

and melting pot, whatever. My research for the past ten years has been located in so-called disadvantaged neighbourhoods in West Dublin, so I see all of this in stereoscopic ways.

I'm not sure if fetishizing the state is a particularly good idea, especially considering that the critique of the last while is that the state is the stand-in for the economy, generally considered relative ignorant of these problems. What's troubling is the idea, the weird fetishization shared only by academics and other symbol workers – that if you get the phrasing right then the world follows suit, that we have to align integration with the state, as if the state is a rational entity that produces instructions and follows them. That's one problem.

I'm willing to say that I think the Irish Government has behaved in ridiculous ways, but here I'm in agreement with them that the processes have been relatively unproblematic. There hasn't been a lack of people trying to capitalize on the issues. Áine Ní Chonaill (spokesperson for the Immigration Control Platform) in the late 1990s held a meeting in a school house in Cork and there were 15 people there, yet the national media carried it. She did her best to make this an issue, but never really gained any traction. So maybe the question should be turned around to ask not what is state policy on integration, but how is the problem of integration becoming a state problem? And that's where you get the question, 'Name the last four all-Ireland winners?' in the citizenship tests. Ludicrous bits of signatures – not even evidence – of integration. So the question is how does the state see integration? And this is how it will play out against the less powerful. And there's going to be two parts to that, two opportunities for the less powerful: there's ways that the less powerful can mark and cement it and ways that other less powerful people can become pissed off with their neighbour. As opposed to being annoyed with the bank they will look side-ways or down. That is where I would worry about the flashpoints, in that arc you can draw from the North Inner City, that's where you will find the foot soldiers ...

There's also the point that this whole problem of integration has in fact been central to the modern nation-state, the cultural nationalism in which has involved some notion of fictive blood. One could take a lot of the contemporary discourse and take it back to the Dreyfus Affair in the late nineteenth century – recently arrived population, they don't think like us, etc. So we tend to de-historicize all of this by connecting it to the state and then naively thinking that if we somehow sorted out the state's organs in the here and now then we can have a rational technocratic solution to the question of integration. The question that's really: why integration now?

### Robin Hanan

I don't think you have to go as far as the Dreyfus Affair. Take the debates in Britain over Catholic emancipation:

they usually took the tone, 'We'd like to involve them in our society, but they're priest-ridden and closed, and they wear different clothes (not quiet hijabs), but when they grow up they'll be different, more like us and maybe then they can vote.'

On the question of the state, I think it's wrong to think of state policy as one policy in Ireland. Different arms of the state talk and act in different ways. One thing that I find very frustrating as someone who works with asylum seekers is that on the one hand you have a lot of very broad, well meaning, well phrased discussion about social inclusion, an area that the state has relatively little influence on, areas where communities either solve or don't solve things for themselves, areas where the economy is dominant, or areas like planning where Ireland is so bad at so many levels that the state shows little influence. On the other hand, you also have very hard policy in areas like habitual residency permits, direct provision, things like the very harsh qualifications to become a refugee, all of the barriers that are put in the way for people who have come to work here to put down roots into the community, bringing their families in, claim benefits. All of this is hard policy, which tends to be negative.

I tend to think of it along the lines of guests – there's a new book out called *New Guests of the Irish Nation* – I think the attitude is that when people come into our house we tend to be friendly and welcoming, but we're very careful who we let in.

I think the real test for Ireland is not going to be just the competition for resources, which is going to be tough, but it's also going to be about this sense of who really belongs in the country. When you compare Ireland to other European countries, on the one hand you don't have this hard, overt racism – Aine Ní Connell is not exactly Le Pen, she's not a populist leader – but, then again, we're a couple of generations behind. What we do have, however, is a very strong sense of them and us. There's very little sense in popular culture that people who have come here recently have a right to be here. There's a very real sense in Irish society that the people who came here during the boom years will go somewhere else when things get hard, and maybe it's the job of our government to encourage people to move on to somewhere else and to make it just that bit more difficult to come here. In the area of asylum it's very overt: the Department of Justice talk very openly about push and pull factors, with their understanding that their main objective is to try to make it as hard as possible to come to Ireland. Even in the popular sense, there is a feeling that it was nice to have people here during the boom, but now things are getting harder and they should go somewhere else and let us get on with our lives. This is the real challenge: to change from a sense of guest to a sense of entitlement. I don't think we are anywhere near that in Ireland. For all the criticisms we make of the ex-colonial powers that now have three to four generations of immigration, that sense of entitlement is much deeper in London, Paris or Rome. People sometimes say that we're a country that should understand migration because we're a country of

immigrants, another way of thinking about that is that we are a country of people who didn't emigrate – the people who emigrated are in America or in Germany or the UK – and the sense that immigrants are not part of our culture runs much deeper than in many other European countries.

### **From the floor ...**

Issah Huseini argued in his presentation that integration is probably not a good concept for the social sciences, and perhaps we can think about these relations at an individual level. For example, you, the immigrant, must do better than everyone else. In France, where I live, North African immigrants, young girls are told, 'You have to change!' And, this is perhaps the symbolic violence in the society, to say 'You have to change!'

In French intellectual life there are three examples we may think about. First a film about the work of Pierre Bourdieu with a scene where he is in a social centre, and most of the people there are social workers or students of the second generation from North Africa, and he explains that he had to lose his accent of the south in order to be integrated into the academy. Then he explained to them – all in inverted commas – 'You have to lose your "bad" accent.'

Second, Derrida, our great philosopher, explained that a regional accent is no good. You cannot be a philosopher and have a regional accent. And, he had a very strong accent from his people and his birth in Algeria.

Third, a well-known intellectual from the right made comments following the events of 2005 to the effect that you cannot pretend to democracy when you speak with the accent of the suburbs. If you want to get inside politics you must have the 'television accent' – the 'no accent' of the television.

The point is that this is the way that society constructs itself violently. And, in countries like France this is also becoming police violence. We review what is 'good' integration by the accent spoken, by school results – and bad results mean exclusion. This is it exactly: integration is exclusion! In France integration is an instrument for a policy of exclusion.

### **Gavan Titley**

I think that this intervention connects up the way in which the question has changed from 'What do we mean when we say integration?' to 'Why are we talking about integration now?' I think this is something we could profitably focus on, from the micro-biopolitics such as the right accent to the discussion opened by Rita Verdonk the former Minister for Integration in the Netherlands when she said they were the defenders of gay rights because they wanted to show photographs of gay couples kissing to prospective Muslim immigrants.

But how do we respond to the challenge set out by Arjun Appadurai when he says that under current

conditions the modern nation-state is no longer capable of following through on the promise of integration and that, therefore, in many ways, while we might discuss questions of inequality, questions that are political and economic, the discourse of integration is cultural? As Appadurai argues, it's 'culture' where sovereignty can be reclaimed and where grand statements about diversity can be made, where we can have control and where in other areas of political and economic life that kind of control is no longer possible. Is that one of the reasons why the question has become, 'Why integration now?'

### **From the floor ...**

Partially, but without becoming distressed about the functionalist logic that some abstract entity called the state insists that it has control over this process while it throws up its hands over things that are massively impacting people.

The more this is performative in a weak sense the more opportunities there are for exposing the limits of the state, the more opportunities there are to think through the alternatives.

To take a more bottom up approach, we could also ask, 'In what ways do people integrate?' The amusing thing about the Dutch Party waving the photograph of a gay couple kissing is that the partner to anti-Semitism in the history of the nation-state was the homosexual – that minority that was scarcely visible, constantly eroding from the inside the pillars of the state. You couldn't tell; there was no blood test; no colour. So the despised minority from the decades past becomes a club to beat new immigrants? And the micro politics are appalling! We might start to consider this as a moment and not fetishize the elements of this moment.

### **Issah Huseini**

We are in a situation at the moment where there is no real recognition of permanent immigrants in this culture. People think they will just pack up and go after the Tiger is dead. And over the last year we have the Minister for State for Integration saying he is not responsible for immigration, so you have immigration laws that are not consistent with integration aspirations. We cannot have one government department preaching one thing and another department or agency doing the opposite. The immigration system is making it so hard for people to even think that they belong to this nation that it's preventing integration.

### **Clement Esebamen**

I'm very tempted to dive into this, but more important for me is the question of why is integration problematic. Let's take for example the reports of increased racist attacks on people in parts of Dublin. Stabbings, beatings, gangs of youths, these are worrying things for people. We're talking about integration, but what

about them, what if there is no resolution for their own individual traumatic experiences? This is where the state does come in: I'm asking how the police respond to a crime on the streets because the person looks different. Initially this went into the bureaucratic maze as priority one hundred and twenty. They have a drugs raid, they have a murder to solve – this is the pressure they're under, that every policeman is under. How do we respond to this? We respond to racist attacks in this country by counting them and listing the numbers. What good does that do? And it spreads. That boy can't go around without friends any more, so now there's a group of black boys together. It's also about a perception that nothing is being done, and that's why I think that the state and its organs should be well prepared to deal with this kind of thing. My idea was to use new structures at local level – the joint committees on policing for example – to identify areas, deal with the issues and actually have results.

The problem is that we don't think about what happens at the micro level if proper channels of engagement are not in place. And, this can only happen if they are promoted by established systems of the state.

I've spent nine months working with central government. People ask whether your perspective changes and of course it does because you are exposed to a wide variety of information from different sources. But one perspective hasn't changes one bit. I think that we have a number of serious problems being stored up in this country if we don't develop systems and responses to examples like I just gave.

We also have to look at the education system. And this is where I am in favour of the English language – no one is asking anyone to take up Irish dancing for example, but what is apparent, and what the Minister has been pushing is the whole area of language acquisition. Even in the country I came from, in Nigeria, if you don't have English you are consigned to a short, hard life. This is an area where we can make progress.

### **Robin Hanan**

I would agree with Clement that integration should be about removing barriers and practical steps, and language I think is probably the most important of those to give people the tools to get out there and participate in society. And while it is true that no one is forced to take up Irish dancing, there is a sense in this debate that people must partake of a particular vision of Irish national culture.

But to go back to the state, the Department of Justice is one of the driving forces behind policy, and for most migrants coming into the country, your security, the documents you have your right to come into the country, to be here, settle, bring your family, to take up services and employment, these are fundamentally important. For immigrants, the Department of Justice functions as the state as gate-keeper; the people who

work for the Department of Justice very clearly see their job as defending the country as far as possible from undesirable outsiders and perhaps letting in the kind of people that the rest of society finds useful. But it doesn't see itself as a positive force. This comes across in a number of ways. Even in terms of public opinion, we come across all the time when there is any suggestion of changes to asylum policy or in the asylum system, we find ourselves up against a very strong, very hostile machine. Whenever the security wing of the state feels threatened or undermined by a more liberal approach we find this reaction. At the same time, other wings of the state are putting a lot of useful effort into issues like the education system.

For all its faults the primary education system has adapted relatively well as compared with other countries to all the challenges that come with increased immigration. So you have this division between one wing of the state saying one thing and another wing of the state saying something else. But what we saw in the Citizenship Referendum was a very strong statement by one wing of the state mobilizing the sense that while we have no problem with the Other coming to the country, the Other doesn't belong here: the fact of your birth here doesn't make you a citizen; there are a lot of other things that do make you a citizen.

I can remember some of my children's friends talking about how they welcomed immigration and the fact that the country was becoming more multicultural, but they didn't feel that people should come here just to have babies and get citizenship. My children would tell me, 'Such-and-such's parents don't want black people coming to the country, so they would be voting yes.' So we were talking one language on the surface with another one beneath. As with so much social policy there is a soft wing talking about anti-racism and multiculturalism on the other hand there is a very hard wing of the state that has the legal basis to actually do something, which the other wing doesn't tend to have, which is able to make it very difficult for people to get documentation, very difficult for people to gain status and which is trying to influence public opinion in a security conscious way.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> This is an edited version of a roundtable discussion recorded at the 'Managing Migration' conference held in NUI Maynooth on 5 May 2009. The conference was supported through the financial assistance of the Research Office, NUI Maynooth.