
Boundaries of the State and Politics of Everyday Life in Ireland

Mark Maguire
Fiona Murphy

The UNHCR (2006) has expressed concern about “the securitization of migration,” especially the fortification of borders, long periods of detention in camps, and the “off-shore” processing of refugees. Anthropologists are attending to how nation-states control migrants and, indeed, categorize them as refugees and asylum seekers. Research has also explored detention centres as assemblages of humanitarian care and state security, often drawing on the work of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben to disclose the operations of power and an “anthropology of suffering.” But asylum seekers have too often been represented as voiceless victims, capable only of accommodating power or occasionally resisting it. Alternative research frames are possible, and alternative visions are available within and beyond “the camp” as the political space of modernity. Ireland offers interesting insights in this regard.

Ireland operates a system of direct provision centres for asylum claimants, composed of over fifty semi-privatised hidden villages. The largest is Mosney, a former Butlins resort wherein residents subsist in decaying holiday chalets on €19.10 per week per adult. Recent Eurostat data indicate that 98% of claims in Ireland are rejected, the highest percentage in the EU. The system functions as a deterrent to unregulated migration and provides significant business opportunities—private companies draw down a significant proportion of the €90 million per annum asylum budget.

From 2009 to 2011, we carried out ethnographic fieldwork with African migrants. Our research participants often spent several years in the asylum system while maintaining both local and transnational connections. However, we also focused on those who left the asylum system and were embarking on integration. Here we summarize our work on Pentecostalism as a way to unsettle the popular research frames that either focus on the camp as a paradigm of state/non-citizen relations or represent migrants in dyadic integration relationships with nation-states. Here we present fragments intended to evoke research participants’ lives while provoking new ways of framing research.

Rethinking the Camp

Mosney asylum seeker camp is ringed by fences and CCTVs yet it is a place of life and movement. The main promenade, lined by brightly-coloured chalets, is the communal front-yard of children from dozens of nationalities, but especially Nigeria and DR Congo. First glances suggest a mass-produced holiday postcard, but people are warehoused in Mosney for years, amid the *pentimento*-like traces of other people’s happy memories. We met a young Pentecostal pastor in an African church next to a disused ballroom in Mosney: “There are a lot of nationalities here...a lot of stress, a lot of depression, a lot of troubles...We try to...encourage them, you know, by the word of God...We encourage them as a Christian to prosper...Encouragement

outside the context of the Bible, we don't do that." He indicated the powerful role of Pentecostalism within the asylum system: Pentecostalism offers faith, hope and charity to precarious lives.

When, occasionally, African asylum seekers "get status" they are expected to integrate into deregulated labour markets. Some gain footholds in the taxi industry, which was deregulated in 2000 in the spirit of Chicago School economics. Competition among drivers is fierce; suicides are common. Taxi ranks are racially contested sites, because no queuing system obtains. "That one went and come back again," said one African driver. "So he made me mad. ... I can't blame God for making me a black man, you know? ... Am I not a human being?" Pentecostalism offers resources and alternate frames for life itself, as the words of one driver illustrate:

[It] is pure racism when someone looks at you and say, "Oh, it is a black driver," and then goes behind you and finds a white driver. [...] Is it I am a subhuman being? ...No!...God can give me the courage to accept the things I cannot change and the wisdom to change the things I can.

Pentecostalism is present in detention centres and in life thereafter. We attended events within several African churches located in inexpensive warehouses in unobtrusive industrial districts. TV cameras often record services for broadcast on the Internet. During passionate services, pastors included community-service announcements about welfare or available accommodation. Once, during testimony, a nervous-looking taxi driver said, "Last night I drove a man... but when I got there another man put a gun to my head—the Lord saved me last night!" His testimony struck us forcefully. Too often we had witnessed racialized representations of asylum seekers as suspect populations; too often we noted their portrayal as passive victims. But Pentecostalism was a key frame through which they were producing alternate structures of feeling.

The power *of* life evident among African Pentecostals was hammered home to us during a Jesus Walk through a historic Irish town in 2010. The objective was to re-enchant the landscape and inspire hope during the severe economic recession. At one stage we paused, following a pastor's lead, outside a branch of Allied Irish Bank. He prayed that we would all follow a better path in life and not place our trust in "doomed economics." As his prayers turned to the banking system his tone sharpened. Satan, he told us, had entered the Irish banks. The system must be cleansed: "We will drive Satan out of the banking system!" The pastor's words reverberated around the streets of the town. From his perspective, integration, belonging and life itself were configured very differently to governmental constructions of the migrant as an object of (in)securitization and some media imaginings of the migrant as passive and voiceless victim of outside forces.

Discussion

Anthropologists have contributed to understanding the ongoing securitization of migration and the ramifications for people's lives within and beyond camps and asylum systems. Our work speaks to this literature. During several years of ethnographic research we explored areas of people's lives, such as work, political

activism, religion and youth identities. Our focus was on African refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland who were struggling to carve out a meaningful world for themselves amid great hostility. The Irish asylum system is harsh, and recent EU-MIDIS data indicate that Sub-Saharan Africans are among the ‘top ten’ most discriminated against groups in Europe. But our work eschews all-encompassing theories that seek to explain the repressive actions of states and the victimization of migrants as objects of (in)securitization. Instead, our focus continues to be on everyday lives and new articulations of life itself. Pentecostal Christianity is offering different perspectives, voices from the margins, faith, hope, charity and much else besides. When situated against the seemingly endless waiting and wasting of the Irish asylum system and the austere neo-liberalism of integration for the few, the mushrooming of Pentecostal churches should be of little surprise. Commenting on the rise of neoliberalism, Michel Foucault, in one of his last lecture courses, described the transition from *raison d’État* to a form of governmentality via the rule of law, *l’État de droit*—a bleak form of rule without little place for the human. More recently, Achille Mbembé and Stephen Rendall reflected on the extraordinary growth of African Pentecostalism and proposed that we are witnessing the rise of a new *l’état de religion*—alternate structures of meaning that provide “a means of psychic negotiation, self-styling, and engagement with the world at large.” This deserves critical attention as a potent and potentially political force in people’s everyday lives, but it also unsettles the monotonous assertions of power as a dyad composed of powerful actors and states on one level and the voiceless on the other end of the scale.

Mark Maguire lectures in the department of anthropology, National University of Ireland Maynooth. He is author of Differently Irish (Woodfield, 2004) and editor-in-chief of Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale. Fiona Murphy also lectures in the department of anthropology, National University of Ireland Maynooth. She is a former postdoctoral research fellow on the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS)-funded project, “After Asylum: refugee integration in Ireland.”

This essay is based on Fiona and Mark’s book Integration in Ireland: The Everyday Lives of African Migrants, which is forthcoming with Manchester University Press.