Chapter 11

Race and Immigration in Contemporary Ireland

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Introduction

Since the 1990s the Republic of Ireland has become, for the first time in modern history, a country of net immigration. In the period from 1995 to 2004, 486,300 people moved to Ireland. In the same period, 263,800 people emigrated, resulting in net immigration of 222,500 (see Table 11.1). Since then, between May 2004 and December 2006 around 300,000 PPSNs (Personal Public Service Numbers) were issued to workers from accession states (O'Brien 2007).

The Central Statistics Office reported, in September 2004, that the population of Ireland had exceeded four million for the first time since 1871 and between 1996 and 2006, the overall population of the state increased by 16.8 per cent from 3.62 million to 4.23 million (CSO 2007). Reasons for this recent growth in immigration to Ireland are complex, but they include Ireland's economic strength (the 'Celtic Tiger' era), the Northern Ireland ceasefires, and EU enlargement in 2004 (see Kitchin and Bartley 2007).

Growing numbers of immigrants is not in itself an unusual phenomenon in a wealthy Western country. Yet Ireland is different from many Western countries because of its long experience of emigration. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ireland was a net exporter of people. Millions of Irish people – thousands within each generation – fled poverty and political and social repression to seek work and new lives abroad, thus creating a large, global Irish diaspora. The extent of emigration led geographer Jim MacLaughlin, writing just over ten years ago, to describe Ireland as an 'emigrant nursery' (MacLaughlin 1994). Despite recent economic growth in Ireland, emigration from the country continues, and Irish politicians and the Catholic Church continue to be active in lobbying on behalf of the thousands of undocumented Irish immigrants currently living in the United States. Irish identity has thus traditionally been associated with the act of migration. As writer Polly Devlin commented, 'emigration was a big sad Irish word in every sense ... We were all poised on the point of eternal emigration' (in Logue 2000, 42).

In this chapter, we reflect on the impact of these recent changes in migration patterns to and from Ireland. We are primarily interested in the relationship between these changes and the construction, or indeed reconstruction, of Irish

Table 11.1 Emigration from and immigration to Ireland and net migration rates, 1995–2004

Emigration from Ireland											
To	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
UK	13,300	14,100	12,900	8,500	11,200	7,200	7,800	7,400	6,300	4,900	93,600
EU	5,100	5,100	4,100	4,300	5,500	5,500	5,600	4,800	4,300	3,400	47,700
USA	8,200	5,200	4,100	4,300	5,300	4,000	3,400	4,800	2,500	2,800	44,600
ROW	6,600	6,800	7,900	4,100	9,500	10,000	9,500	8,500	7,600	7,400	77,900
	33,200	31,200	29,000	21,200	31,500	26,700	26,300	25,500	20,700	18,500	263,800
Immigration to Ireland											
Nationality	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
Irish	17,600	17,700	20,500	23,200	26,700	24,800	26,300	27,000	17,500	16,900	218,200
UK	5,800	8,300	8,200	8,300	8,200	8,400	9,000	7,400	6,900	5,900	76,400
EU	3,200	5,000	5,500	5,800	6,900	8,200	6,500	8,100	6,900	10,600	66,700
USA	1,500	4,000	4,200	2,200	2,500	2,500	3,700	2,700	1,600	1,800	26,700
ROW	3,100	4,200	5,500	4,500	4,500	8,600	13,600	21,700	17,700	14,900	98,300
	31,200	39,200	43,900	44,000	48,800	52,500	59,100	66,900	50,600	50,100	486,300
Net migration											
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	
	-2,000	8,000	14,900	22,800	17,300	25,800	32,800	41,400	29,900	31,600	222,500

Sources: CSO (2000, 2004).

identity. In particular, we discuss the changing racialisation of Irish identity as a consequence of and response to immigration. We thus chart the change in migration patterns and reflect on the state's attempts to define and place new immigrants through a variety of political responses. In particular, we discuss the 2004 Citizenship Referendum, its racist overtones, and its fundamental rescripting of the nature of Irish citizenship and identity designed to limit immigration of non-white peoples. We conclude with a discussion of the impact of European accession on race and immigration in the Irish context.

From Emigration to Immigration

For the two centuries prior to the present period of immigration, Ireland had been a net exporter of people. Migration from Ireland has peaked periodically, usually connected to difficult economic, political and social periods in the country. Periods of significant out-migration include the years immediately following the Great Famine, the 1950s and the 1980s. For example, it is estimated that over 600,000 people emigrated from Ireland (twenty-six counties) in the period from 1851 to 1855 (Miller 1985). By 1961, there were over 750,000 people of Irish birth living in Britain (Ferriter 2004). Between 1987 and 1996, the Central Statistics Office estimates that over 430,000 people emigrated from Ireland, peaking in 1989 when over 70,000 people – 2 per cent of the population – left the country. The process continues today, with roughly 20,000 people – the majority under 25 years of age – emigrating annually (CSO 2006).

However, while emigration from Ireland continues, its significance has been occluded by recent changes in patterns of immigration to Ireland. In 1996, Ireland experienced net immigration, and since that year levels of immigration and of net immigration have been steadily increasing producing the most sustained period of net immigration to Ireland since independence. This was not the first time: for a short period in the 1970s, Ireland also experienced net immigration, but this was quickly reversed with the advent of a global economic downturn and the escalation of violence in Northern Ireland. Just as in the 1970s, the majority of immigrants to Ireland in the contemporary period are returning Irish and their families, or citizens of other EU countries, most noticeably the UK. For the period from 1995 to 2004, 45 per cent of immigrants to Ireland were Irish, and 30 per cent were from the EU (over half of these were from the UK). For these immigrants, entry to Ireland is unproblematic, and they have unrestricted access to the Irish labour market. This is not the case for immigrants with other than EU citizenship. The main entry routes to Ireland for such immigrants were as work permit holders, as asylum seekers or refugees, or as working visa/work authorisation holders. Work permits, working visas and work authorisations represent Ireland's labour migration strategies. Working visas and work authorisations (WV/WA) were issued to highly skilled workers required for the information technology, medical and construction sectors. The numbers of immigrants admitted to Ireland under this scheme were low (see Table 11.2). Work permits were issued to less skilled workers needed in the service sectors, agriculture, catering and industry. Prior to

EU enlargement in May 2004, the majority of work permits were issued to citizens of the EU-10, particularly Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Since May 2004, the number of work permits issued annually has fallen (see Table 11.3).

Table 11.2   Total working visas/work authorisations issued 2000–2005

Year	Working visas	Work authorisations	Total
2000	991	392	1,383
2001	2,667	1,082	3,749
2002	1,753	857	2,610
2003	791	367	1,158
2004	1,098	346	1,444
2005	2,307	278	2,585

Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (personal communication).

Table 11.3   Total work permits issued 1999–2006

Year	New permits	Renewals	Group permits	Total	Refused
1999	4,328	1,653	269	6,250	Not known
2000	15,434	2,271	301	18,006	Not known
2001	29,594	6,485	357	36,436	Not known
2002	23,326	16,562	433	40,321	1,310
2003	21,965	25,039	547	47,551	1,838
2004	10,020	23,246	801	34,067	1,486
2005	7,354	18,970	812	27,136	1,215
2006	6,289	14,258	848	21,395	1,123

Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. http://www.entemp.ie/labour/workpermits/statistics.htm, accessed October 2004, March 2005, March 2007.

The schemes clearly made assumptions about the desirability and treatment of different labour migrants. The WV/WA was a fast-track programme where the migrant worker applies for a visa/authorisation through the Irish embassy in their country. In contrast, employers applied for and held work permits on behalf of their employees, leaving the employee tied to that site of work and creating large power differentials that have clearly been exploited in a number of cases. Work permit holders have significantly less rights to state services and family reunification than WV/WA holders. These distinctions have been maintained in new employment permits legislation, introduced with effect from February 2007

(DETE 2007). Figures for asylum applications have risen from a low of 39 in 1992 to an annual level of over 4,000, peaking at 11,634 in 2002 (see Table 11.4).

Table 11.4   Asylum applications in Ireland 1992–2006

Year	No. of applications	Top five countries of origin
1992	39	Not available
1993	91	Not available
1994	362	Not available
1995	424	Not available
1996	1,179	Not available
1997	3,883	Not available
1998	4,626	Not available
1999	7,724	Not available
2000	10,938	Nigeria, Romania, Czech Republic, Moldova, DR Congo
2001	10,325	Nigeria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia
2002	11,634	Nigeria, Romania, Moldova, Zimbabwe, Ukraine
2003	7,900	Nigeria, Romania, DR Congo, Moldova, Czech Republic
2004	4,766	Nigeria, Romania, Somalia, China, Sudan
2005	4,323	Nigeria, Romania, Somalia, Sudan, Iran
2006	4,314	Nigeria, Sudan, Romania, Iran, Iraq

Source: ORAC (2006).

Other routes of entry for migrants from outside the EU are as holders of student visas (especially Chinese), working holiday visas (issued to people under 35 from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Hong Kong) or holiday visas. The preliminary results of the 2006 Census indicate that over 10 per cent of the resident population of Ireland classifies their nationality as other than Irish, and over 14 per cent were born outside Ireland (CSO 2007).

What is striking about these recent migration streams to Ireland is their heterogeneity. Official figures from the CSO prior to Census 2006 classify all migrants from outside the EU and the US as ROW (Rest of World). Hidden in that catch-all classification is the range of nationalities immigrating to Ireland on an annual basis. For example, in 2006 work permits were issued to citizens of over 100 countries, with significant numbers issued to citizens of the Philippines, India, Ukraine, South Africa, Romania, Brazil and China (DETE 2006), and the majority of asylum application were received from citizens of Nigeria, Sudan, Romania, Iran and Iraq (ORAC 2006). In 2005, working visas and work

authorisations were issued to citizens of over 50 countries, particularly India and the Philippines. It is important to highlight that heterogeneity, in this context, refers entirely to nationality. The official collection of information on immigrants to Ireland predominantly focuses on nationality, and gives little information on racial diversity in the country. Census 2002 collected no data about racial identification in Ireland. The only direct question on ethnicity asked respondents to identify if they were members of the Irish Traveller community. The most recent Census, in 2006, included a new question entitled ethnic and cultural background. Despite its title, the focus of the question was on race, even though the racial categories provided were confusing and inadequate (O'Toole 2006).

Table 11.5 Ethnic and cultural background of Irish residents, 2006

Category	%
White Irish	87.4
White Irish Traveller	0.5
Any other White background	6.9
Black or Black Irish: African	1.0
Black or Black Irish: Any other Black background	0.1
Asian or Asian Irish: Chinese	0.4
Asian or Asian Irish: Any other Asian background	0.9
Other including mixed background	1.1
Not stated	1.7
	100.0

Source: Central Statistics Office (2007).

As a consequence, there are no official statistics on the ethnic composition of the resident population of Ireland. In addition, the state's failure to gather even the most basic data on the racial composition of its population means that assertions about the relationship between 'race' and immigration are difficult to substantiate.

Responding to Immigration

Many public debates about immigration in Ireland are framed in terms of the Irish experience of emigration. The National Action Plan against Racism makes this explicit, claiming that 'the Irish have been a migrant people for a very long time', subject to racism both at home and abroad (NPAR 2005). There is significant evidence to support the claim of racism directed against Irish emigrants, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, where the Irish were described as simian and wild, and associated with dirt, disease, poverty and savagery (see, for example, Engels 1958; Miller 1985; Ignatiev 1995; Curtis 1997;

Hickman and Walter 1997; Roediger 1999). Reminders of the Irish emigrant experience periodically resurface in political utterances about immigration: in the words of the President, Mary McAleese: 'we hope our distilled wisdom and experience will enable us to ensure rapid and easy melding of our new citizens into Irish life. Of all people on the planet we have no excuse for getting it wrong' (McAleese 2007).

Mindful of this experience, but aware of significant changes in the pace and scale of immigration to Ireland, people have struggled to find an adequate vocabulary to describe and debate these changes. Many public figures are careful to speak about immigration in neutral language, and those who breach these unwritten codes are often publicly censured.[1] The six main political parties endorsed an anti-racism protocol prior to the 2002 elections (Fanning and Mutwarasibo 2007, 442). Politicians insisted that they would not 'play the race card', and made political capital from claims that others did. Concurrently, policy initiatives and legislation directed against discrimination and racism were introduced. These included the ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 2000, the Employment Equality Act (1998) and the Equal Status Act (2000) (McVeigh and Lentin 2002, 6; Tannam 2002, 197). The government also established two bodies with responsibility for monitoring these acts and providing guidance on issues of equality, race and interculturalism. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI), established in 1997, acts in a policy advisory role to the government and develops anti-racist programmes. The Equality Authority was established in 1999, and its role is to promote and defend equality rights. The NCCRI and the Equality Authority together act as the national focal points for RAXEN, the European Racism and Xenophobia Network. Membership of the EU has been instrumental in providing the impetus for legislative change with an anti-racist and anti-discriminatory agenda. The National Action Plan against Racism (NPAR), published in January 2005, provides the most explicit statement about the relationship between immigration and racism:

> Inward migration is not the cause of racism. Cultural diversity and racism existed in Ireland before the recent increase in people coming to live in Ireland ... [R]acism is an issue we must tackle regardless of inward migration. (NPAR 2005)

Despite these initiatives and pronouncements, it is clear that early debates about immigration to Ireland were racialised. From the 1990s onwards, public debates about immigration focused primarily on refugees and asylum seekers, who represented a small proportion of the overall numbers of immigrants. Refugees and asylum seekers were often racialised as 'black', even though no accurate figures were publicly available to legitimate this claim. As a consequence, there has been a widespread belief that Ireland is being 'overrun' by black immigrants (Cullen 2000), generally understood as refugees and asylum seekers. Fianna Fáil TD Noel O'Flynn voiced these sentiments in a speech in 2002, when he said that 'the asylum seeker crisis was out of control' and the country was being held hostage by 'spongers, wasters and conmen.' Though denying his remarks were racist, O'Flynn

claimed that putting large amounts of refugees from different ethnic backgrounds together was a 'powder keg waiting to explode' (in Spendiff 2002). It is important to acknowledge, however, that for many would-be immigrants from countries with substantial non-white populations, asylum represents one of the main entry routes to Ireland (see Table 11.4). Working visas, work authorisations and work permits are predominantly issued to citizens of countries with substantial white populations, or to citizens of countries like the Philippines, which shares a Catholic heritage with the Republic of Ireland. In addition, citizens of such countries have been specifically targeted to fill job vacancies in Ireland (Loyal 2003). In this way, public discourses helped to create a semantic association of black people with asylum seekers, and of asylum seekers with immigrants (White 2002, 104). This was further exacerbated by a seeming reluctance on the part of some government officials and media to separate issues of asylum and immigration, preferring instead to conflate the two.

In this way, asylum seekers – implicitly understood as black – became increasingly problematised. In response to the growing numbers of asylum seekers, the government introduced a range of punitive measures, including the Immigration (Trafficking) Bill of 1999 and the amendment of the Refugee Act in 2000, which together served to make it more difficult to successfully claim asylum in Ireland and to increase deportation rates. In terms of the treatment of asylum seekers, the government introduced a system of direct provision in April 2000, which limited support to basic accommodation, meals, and weekly cash allowances of IR£15 for adults and IR£7.50 for children (Fanning 2002, 103).[2] Asylum seekers were also dispersed outside Dublin to centres of direct provision, often local hostels and hotels commandeered for the purpose, and often in the face of widespread local opposition because of a perceived connection between asylum seekers, crime and disease. Asylum seekers are regularly portrayed by politicians in negative terms. John O'Donoghue, a previous Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, described asylum seekers as 'illegal immigrants and as exploiters of the Irish welfare system' (in Fanning 2002, 103). More recently, the recently deposed Minister of Justice, Michael McDowell, described the accounts of asylum seekers as 'cock-and-bull' stories, claiming that he 'would prefer to interview these people at the airport' (Holland 2005).

The problematisation of asylum seekers has led to a variety of moral panics: about the 'invasion' of (black) asylum seekers, and about the consequent abuse of Irish citizenship legislation and social welfare benefits (see Luibhéid 2004). This gives legitimacy to practical actions that are both controlling and excluding: controlling racial and ethnic diversity while at the same time managing and facilitating white migration. This has been obvious in the state enforcement of immigration policy through deportation. Two groups of people are generally deported: those whose asylum applications were refused, and those whose parents' applications for asylum were refused (though the deportees were, themselves, Irish citizens by birth). Deportations of people who have entered Ireland on holiday or work visas or permits and overstayed or violated the conditions of those visas are extremely rare. These actions have, in part, been successful because they are building on already present xenophobic and racist sentiments (see Cullen 2002;

McVeigh 2002; Rolston and Shannon 2002). Policy discourse has thrived upon these anxieties. In this way, coercive state policies and everyday discriminatory practices in relation to the perceived invasion of unwanted black migrants are legitimised, allowing the state to prevent 'black' immigration while at the same time making it easy to import low-cost, 'white' labour.

The 2004 Citizenship Referendum

The most striking political response to immigration, and the response with the most fundamental and lasting impact on Irish identity, was the 2004 Citizenship Referendum. In this referendum, the Irish electorate voted by a margin of four to one for a change in the definition of Irish citizenship. Prior to the referendum, any child born on the island of Ireland had an automatic right to Irish citizenship – a right that was enshrined in the Irish Constitution. As a consequence of the referendum, the right to citizenship by birth was removed from the Constitution. Irish citizenship is now primarily defined by descent (see Lentin 2007).

The referendum was championed by the ruling coalition partners, Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats (PDs), and it was supported by the second largest party, Fine Gael. It was first announced in March 2004 by Michael McDowell, the then PD Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. McDowell described the referendum as 'both rational and necessary'. There was, he wrote, 'a steady stream of people coming to Ireland, both legally and illegally, so as to ensure that their children avail of our present law so as to secure the entitlement to Irish citizenship' (McDowell 2004b). His remarks were echoed by Fianna Fáil, the largest political party in Ireland. The party urged the electorate to support the referendum: their campaign posters read 'Vote Yes for Common Sense Citizenship'. For McDowell and other advocates of the referendum, Irish law had created a 'loophole' that permitted undeserving and undesirable people to gain access to Irish citizenship. Closing this loophole by changing the basis on which citizenship could be granted was, they claimed, the commonsense thing to do. The campaign in favour of the referendum created the illusion of hordes of pregnant women – so-called citizenship tourists – arriving in Ireland late in their pregnancy to give birth, putting themselves and the integrity of Irish citizenship at risk (see Garner 2005; Luibhéid 2004; Lentin 2004, 2005). For example, Michael McDowell commented that pregnant women traveling to Ireland were 'putting themselves at risk (or being put under pressure by their partners or others to take that risk) by undertaking hazardous journeys' (McDowell 2004a). His remarks were supported by Declan Keane, the Master of Holles Street, one of Dublin's main maternity hospitals, who claimed that:

> when these women are arriving late from Nigeria … and often arriving, as I say, unwell, with no idea of when their first menstrual period was, no idea of their dates, some of them with complex medical disorders … Some issues we can't [deal with]. We've seen a massive increase in HIV from some of these countries because in some of them HIV is almost endemic. (RTÉ 2003)

These kinds of claims, bolstered by misleading figures and statistics about births to 'non-national' women in Irish maternity hospitals, helped to create a moral panic around citizenship tourism. The introduction of 'commonsense citizenship' was the state's attempt to assuage the panic it had instigated.

The appeals to commonsense in the lobbying of voters had a number of powerful discursive effects. First, by appealing to commonsense, the 'Yes' campaign sought to stunt accusations of racism or xenophobia. Voting 'Yes' was not about discriminating against immigrants. Rather, its aim was to protect and benefit Ireland through the long-term preservation of culture and safeguarding of the economy. Second, 'commonsense citizenship' worked to focus on the present – the here and now – casting as irrelevant Ireland's own history of emigration and anti-Irish racism. The referendum was about the future, not the past: the past is, after all, a foreign country. It was therefore commonsense for people to vote to shape and protect their future in ways that ignored earlier generations' experiences as immaterial to the contemporary context. Third, commonsense understandings of immigration worked to undermine the legitimacy of a range of immigrants – asylum seekers, refugees, pregnant women – by questioning their authenticity and by generalising their motivations and experiences. The discursive construction and denigration of asylum seekers and 'economic migrants' as bogus, spongers or economic parasites cast doubt on their right to stay in Ireland and claim citizenship for themselves and their children. Fourth, 'commonsense citizenship' worked to (re)define and fix notions of Irishness. On the one hand, there was an appeal to a national, shared culture, but on the other Irishness was defined by blood ties and a rooted legacy in Ireland. To be Irish, one had to have grown up in Ireland or the Irish diaspora, and therefore be assimilated to the 'Irish way of life'. Commonsense therefore cast culture and identity in essentialist terms – as having inherent characteristics – rather than seeing Irishness as something constructed or performed; diverse, contingent, relational and constantly in the process of formation. This essentialist notion of Irishness therefore worked to create an exclusive, universal, rational category, difficult to challenge due to its commonsensical nature. In doing so, it sought to unite anyone who considered themselves Irish through an appeal to a common cultural and genetic heritage.

The attempts by the Citizenship Referendum to fix notions of Irishness mirror earlier attempts to construct a notion of Ireland as a monocultural, homogenous community, where 'masses of cultural expression – alternative realities, virtually alternative countries – were ignored while the Free State/Republic fetishised "Irishness"' (Longley 2001, 9). This version of Irishness emphasised Catholicism, the Irish language, the importance of rural Ireland, and exclusionary cultural organisations such as the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association), and was underpinned by an assumed whiteness. In doing so, it denied the reality of the Irish State as multicultural, with citizens and residents with different ethnicities, religions and racial identities, with variances along lines of gender, class, sexuality and so on. Recent academic work has introduced complexity into discourses of Irish identity (see, for example, Brown 1985; Crowley 2005; Kiberd 1995; Kitchin and Lysaght 2004; Cullen 2000; Garner 2003; Longley and Kiberd 2001; Loyal 2003; Ó Gráda 2006; Rolston and Shannon 2002). Other critical work highlights the extent of dissent from the prevailing orthodoxy, suggesting that many Irish citizens disrupted and challenged organisational and institutional attempts at personal and national regulation (see Ferriter 2004 for a broad-ranging account of many of these acts of resistance). This tradition of dissent was similarly evident in the run up to the referendum. Opposition to the referendum was coordinated by CARR (Campaign against a Racist Referendum), and its supporters included political parties (Labour, Greens and Sinn Féin), trade unions, and special interest groups such as the Union of Students in Ireland, the National Youth Council of Ireland, the National Women's Council of Ireland, the National Traveller Women's Forum and the National Lesbian and Gay Federation. Despite this broad coalition of opposition, the calls for 'commonsense citizenship' were overwhelming accepted. In the wake of the referendum, debates about race and immigration have increasingly shifted focus, from asylum seekers and refugees to economic migrants and 'non-nationals.' The term 'non-national' is frequently used by media and politicians to categorise immigrants, and the discursive denial of nationality again serves to create a distinction between legitimate residents and those whose presence in Ireland is in some way less legitimate.

Conclusion

In May 2004, immediately prior to the Citizenship Referendum, ten new members were admitted into the EU. Ireland was one of just three existing members of the EU (along with the UK and Sweden) who allowed unrestricted movement and access to employment for citizens of the new member states. The consequences of this decision are abundantly clear in the preliminary demographic reports from Census 2006 (see Table 11.6), with Poles and Lithuanians as the third and fourth largest national groups currently resident in the country, a very significant change since Census 2002.

New migrants from the EU-10 are predominantly young and male, and their increasing presence in Ireland is raising new questions in public discourse. Issues of welfare abuse, fraud and citizenship tourism were raised in relation to asylum seekers, but now the concerns are with displacement and violence.[3] Concerns with displacement surface in relation to employment practices, particularly with regard to the replacement of Irish workers by migrant workers receiving lower wages and less benefits. The most high profile expression of this concern related to the passenger and freight shipping company, Irish Ferries. When the company offered redundancy payments to its Irish workers, who they wanted to replace with Eastern European workers, a protest march organised by trade unions attracted up to 100,000 people onto the streets of Dublin. Trade union leaders insisted their concern was with workers' rights, claiming 'there is a threshold of decency below which the Irish people will not accept anybody being dragged, no matter where they come from' (David Begg, quoted in Dooley 2005). However, the leader of the Irish Labour Party, Pat Rabbitte, told a different story, when he insisted that 'displacement is going on in the meat factories and it is going on in the hospitality industry and it is going on in the building industry … there are 40 million or so

Table 11.6   Persons resident and present in Ireland classified by nationality, 2006

Nationality	Number ('000s)	%
Irish	3,706.7	88.84
UK	112.5	2.70
Polish	63.3	1.52
Lithuanian	24.6	0.59
Other EU	75.4	1.81
Other European	24.4	0.58
Nigerian	16.3	0.39
Other African	19.0	0.46
Chinese	11.2	0.27
Other Asian	35.8	0.86
USA	12.5	0.30
Other American	8.6	0.21
Other	16.3	0.39
No nationality	1.3	0.03
Not stated	44.3	1.06
	4,172.2	100.00

Source: Central Statistics Office (2007).

Poles after all, so it is an issue we have to have a look at' (Collins 2006). Opinion polls taken shortly after Rabbitte's statement showed strong support for his views, indicating that 70 per cent of people in Ireland believed that no more foreign workers should be admitted to the country (*Irish Times* 2006). Discourses around violence focus on the alcohol abuse, speeding and road accidents, assaults and murder among EU-10 immigrant communities in particular. This shifting focus serves, in many ways, to deflect attention from issues of racism and discrimination faced by immigrants on a daily basis, experiences that are charted in reports on racist incidents from a variety of state and state-sponsored bodies (CSO 2004; NCCRI 2006).

The shifting focus also deflects from broader and deeper concerns about Irish identity, as migrants come to represent 'all that is newly unfamiliar' (Pred 2000, 31) in a rapidly-changing society. Ireland's new-found confidence and cosmopolitanism is a mask hiding deeply etched and historically rooted anxieties and insecurities. In its new prosperity, 'commonsense' Ireland has been quick to sideline its own emigrant past. Instead, it has embraced the neoliberal, right-wing and racist rhetoric of Europe and North America. It wants immigrant workers, but it does not want them to stay if the economy experiences a downturn. It will tolerate a minimum of asylum seekers, but only if they are 'genuine' and contribute in 'positive' ways to Irish society. It uses racist rhetoric while at the same time insisting that it is not racist. It expects its citizens to be able to move to and work in any part of the world, but not vice versa. These paradoxes are troubling, but the articulation of 'commonsense citizenship' serves to dispel disquiet in the interests of the common good of the state and its existing citizens. It also mirrors similar experiences in other EU countries such as Denmark, the UK and the Netherlands. The difference, in the case of Ireland, is a long, sustained and substantial history of out-migration, which continues today in the bodies of undocumented Irish in the US. 'Take away the immigrants and their children, and the exiles and theirs', journalist Fintan O'Toole wrote, 'and we have no Irish nation, no Irish culture, no Irish identity' (O'Toole 2004). Through an acknowledgement of Ireland's emigrant past, the personal circumstances of immigrants, the racialised construction of the immigration 'problem', and the recognition of racist practices, the contradictions at the heart of 'commonsense citizenship' are exposed and possibilities for other, less restrictive understandings of citizenship and belonging are made apparent.

Notes

1   For example, Fianna Fáil junior minister Conor Lenihan was under pressure to resign when he described Turkish immigrants as 'kebabs'. The pressure dissipated quite quickly (O'Toole 2005), and Lenihan is now the country's first Minister for Integration.
2   The current weekly rates are €19.10 per adult (£12.90 or $25.50) and €9.50 per child (£6.40 or $12.70).
3   The Habitual Residency clause, introduced in May 2004, means that in general people have to be resident in Ireland for two years before they have any entitlement to social welfare payments.

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