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## **Ireland: from racism without 'race', to 'racism without racists'**

While the Irish have been relentlessly racialized in their diaspora settings, little if any historical work engages with 'race' to understand Irish history *on the island of Ireland* (1). While 'race' was a mainstream prism through which to understand history for social scientists from the first decades of the nineteenth century, there is minimal engagement with it from historians of Ireland, other than to downplay the negative assertions of Anglo-Saxon historiography. (2) Interest in 'race' has come principally from the social sciences, and following McVeigh's pioneering analysis, a small corpus has begun to develop. (3) I want to argue, from the perspective of a sociologist interested in the history of the idea of 'race', that this is a colossal disciplinary gap: that Ireland itself occupies a keystone position in the development of 'race' and the process of racialization. Contrary to the main body of work that pinpoints the Enlightenment and/or the New World as the crucibles of racism, I assert that Ireland was the colonial setting for proto-racism, or, to twist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's formulation (4), racism without 'race'. I argue that the colonization and settlement of Ireland by the English, and later Scots settlers, constitutes the birth of 'race' as a political category that inscribes inequality on the bodies and cultures of the actors. This occurs in the context of the semi-privatized theft of land from indigenous people by the colonizers, a precursor of the New World and Australasian contexts. Moreover, in a paradoxical historical circle, contemporary Ireland has become home to 'racism without racists'— an economic and social space organized by neo-liberal principles of governance and the movement of capital and labor, whose results are to racialize immigrants and Irish nationals alike, regardless of whether or not they are ostensibly 'white'. So this is a journey from a situation in which culture represents all difference, as bodies are so similar, to one where culture is a proxy for physical bodies that are 'raced' and different. The intention is to provide an overarching framework for understanding the significance of 'race' in Irish history, or indeed, as I shall argue, the significance of Ireland for the history of 'race'. I will first define what I mean by 'race' and racialization, before examining the colonial period of Irish history.

## *1 Race and Racialisation*

The concept of racialization has emerged from sociological work on racism and is based on the idea that the object of study should not be “race” itself, but rather, the processes by which “race” becomes salient. I will give a very brief background to this before making a case that historians might find this concept (which relies explicitly on the historicization of social relations, whether at a collective or personal level (5)) appropriate and useful. Particularly since the 1940s in the USA, and the late 1950s in the UK (6), and well into the 1980s in both cases, social science methodological approaches to the subject have followed a “race relations” model, a framework which assumes the existence of ‘races’ and aims to understand their relations (7). This has the result of reifying ‘race’, which we now interpret as being injected with social meanings that differ from one place to another and one period to another, i.e. a social construction that has real material and cultural implications. So instead of treating ‘race’ as part of the puzzle to be comprehended, ‘race relations’ is a reductive public policy paradigm that makes a number of assumptions about people’s identities, including the idea that their racial identity is always the most important social identification.

Critiquing such conceptualizations of race, Michael Omi explains that the meaning of race ‘has been and probably always will be fluid and subject to multiple determinations. Race cannot be seen simply as an objective fact, nor treated as an independent variable.’ (8) Analyses that place the question of race at their heart should therefore take into account ‘how groups not previously defined as ‘races’ have come to be defined in this way and assess the various factors involved in such processes’. (9) Focusing on the process *per se* is significant, according to postcolonial scholar Patrick Wolfe, since ‘racialisation is an exercise of power in its own right, as opposed to a commentary that enables or facilitates a prior exercise of power.’ (10) At times then, racialization can be an intentional endeavor, a series of acts done to others as part of an unequal power relationship. Very obvious ‘racial projects’ to use Omi and Winant’s term (11), such as apartheid, Jim Crow, or the Final Solution lie at one end of the spectrum of this form of relationship. Indeed, this take on racialization can be traced back to Fanon’s use of the term as a synonym of dehumanization, drawn from his experiences of French colonial North Africa (12). However, it is important also to consider that racialization can also be a normal consequence of institutional operations, an intrinsic feature of the modern State’s functions of classification, biopolitics, and governance (13). In both cases, ‘race’ is

a salient factor in the way social resources end up getting allocated, even if this is not the stated objective (as it was in the three instances listed above). Carmichael and Hamilton's well-known distinction between institutional racism (disproportionately impoverishing and effectively killing black children) and individual racism (the 1963 bombing of 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL) indicates how the resource-allocation process results in racially distinctive patterns due to the historical over-representation of black Americans in the working class (14).

Finally, I would suggest that racialization can be a voluntary communal enterprise or strategy, aimed at attaining group solidarity, political advantage and/or countering existing pernicious claims by a dominant group or groups. I am thinking principally of African-America's positive reclaiming of the term 'black' and the assertion of equality in the Black Power movement. Alongside this example, we might also point to the uneven but longstanding tradition of presenting positive images of collective Irishness to counter and overturn hegemonic representations running from Geoffrey Keating's *History of Ireland* (15) through the various cultural and political movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; the Irish Race conventions in the USA from 1910 to 1916; and the Gaelic Revival. There are additionally numerous examples of less obvious projects such as the British-born Chinese attempt to create a space for the development of solidarity that Parker and Song refer to as 'reflexive racialisation' (16), as well as the mundane exercises of cultural capital that are involved in bringing up children. Does teaching your African-American child blackness not also count as racialization (17), just as much as socializing a white child to associate people of color with danger, threat and low levels of social achievement? This end of the debate cannot be dealt with adequately here. Suffice to say that there is a strand of reflexive racialization which is not yet adequately theorized.

When scholars have picked up racialization and run with it, it is primarily the first two of these three meanings that are foregrounded. One of the most enthusiastic historians currently deploying racialization is David Roediger, who, when asked to define the term in 2006, answered:

'I think the big advantage we have now in scholarship on race in the last several decades is that we get to start from the fact that it's a biological fiction. So a term like racialization is just meant to say that race is not biological and is made in society. It describes the processes in which race is made, both by how groups of

workers are slotted into jobs economically and are brought to nations under certain economic circumstances, but also in the way that they're treated in terms of citizenship rights by the state.'

He finally defines it as 'that process through which the political economy and the state sort workers into different racial categories'. (18) Clearly, the role of the state and the labor process are central to this view, which corresponds largely to how it is used in 'racial state' theory.

There are two main points to make about racialization. Firstly, while Roediger's (and Barrett's) concept of 'in-between people' has provoked a certain amount of controversy, I have not yet read any work in that debate which questions the idea of racialization per se as a historical tool. (19) Indeed, among the arsenal of social science instruments, racialization seems to suggest itself as more readily translatable across disciplines (into historical studies) than many others. In any case, sociological analyses generated through this such as those of Miles, Armstrong, Barot and Bird, and Garner are necessarily heavily rooted in historical scholarship (20).

The second point is that as far as I am concerned, the concept of racialization should not evacuate all other forms of identification and/or discrimination from the discursive field. Identifying a group as having been 'racialized' does not exhaust its meanings or suggest that class, gender, nation, etc. are not factors. It would be difficult to maintain that these processes are just about 'race': what can be argued instead is that they have specific racial outcomes. In 1905, the UK introduced its first piece of immigration legislation: the Aliens Act. This was directed at stemming the flow of East European Jews into Britain. However, the wording of the legislation's final draft stipulated that immigration officials had the right to prevent disembarkation of passengers who had paid for steerage (the cheapest passage) and could not show proof of funds to support themselves once in the country. The real targets therefore were poorer East European Jews, excluding them on the basis of 'race', religion, and class, but not one of these identities alone.

Having arrived at a working definition of racialization, and hopefully alluded to the complexities still to be dealt with in defining it fully (this is a work in progress), I shall now turn to the two specific periods in which the racialization of Irishness appears to me highly illustrative of the argument I want to put forward, namely that the history of

Ireland embodies the history of 'race' as well as any other country's history. 'Race' did not only happen in Africa, the Americas or China (21). I also want to draw attention to the theme of productivity as key in the racialization of Irishness, and a topic that permits continuity between the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries.

## *II The Irish Colonial Setting*

### Property

The early English colonization of Ireland took the form of expropriation of land by the Crown. This land was then rented to English settlers and Irish chiefs. The pattern of small semi-nomadic communal property-owning groups that had characterized Irish society was thus, by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, profoundly altered. The labor of the Irish peasantry began to accumulate capital for the English landowners: they were transformed into tenant farmers and laborers tied to particular estates. The kind of employment relations thus approximate to what Charles Mills describes as 'racial exploitation'. (22) While class exploitation is based principally on wages, Mills' racialized subordinate population (R2) is either totally excluded from work, or recruited by members of the dominant group (R1) under conditions that differ from those of other workers. He asserts that in the colonial system, nonwhites are coerced to work, while white workers in the metropolis are compelled by the market to work. While this is true of the American colonies, in the Irish colonies, the workers, like the dominant group, are white. Moreover, the R2s (in this case Catholic Irish) are not part of the R1 group (English and Scots protestants) to which democratic norms apply. Indeed, Canny sees the 1570s as the moment when norms -in terms of the parameters of relations between colonizer and colonized- shift, so that by the end of the 1500s, it was acceptable to massacre civilians (23). Massacres in Munster and Ulster (carried out by forces led by Humphrey Gilbert in 1569, and the Earl of Essex in 1574 respectively), marked a point of no return. The pacification of the Ulster rebellion a generation later saw 'scorched earth' policies and the destruction of food sources as a deliberate strategy to create a famine.

The rights and privileges of the Irish were reduced both individually (in terms of access to positions, voting rights and property inheritance) and corporately, as in the way that punishment for resistance was meted out to particular towns involved removing trade

privileges for example (24). After 1641, the re-conquest of Ireland resulted in a looser arrangement of quasi-privatized ownership that had been foreshadowed by the plantations of Munster, Ulster, Laois and Offaly in the late 1500s and early 1600s. The confiscated Catholic lands were redistributed among individual Protestant settlers rather than being held by the Crown – there was effectively no Crown to hold them until 1660. In the second section of his ‘racial exploitation’ thesis, Mills goes on to identify areas other than wages as arenas of exploitation, and the State as an actor in them (25). These are ‘not a matter of a single transaction’, he contends, ‘but ... a multiply interacting set with repercussions continually compounding and feeding back in a destructive way’ (26). This is the point at which we can discuss racialization as a process embracing the cultural which *exceeds* class exploitation. While the process of land appropriation can be likened to Enclosure, which also ended up creating landless tenant farmers and peasants in England, or the Highland clearances (a step along the spectrum toward the removal of Native Americans and Australians from their ancestral land), the justificatory discourse that both accompanied and enabled further exploitation lies at the heart of the racialization argument. So what is this to do with ‘race’?

### The Racialized Meaning of Property

Racialization entails discursively attaching bodies to a fixed culture. The Irish, English and Scots distinguished each other by religion, class, language but not physical appearance. The legitimization of English rule had always been based on the perceived civilizational discrepancy between the English and the Irish. While no phenotypical difference is talked of in contemporary documentation, it overflows with cultural distinctions. These were made on a number of criteria including, prominently, property ownership and attachment to land. The apex of civilization according to the Protestant colonial administrators and commentators was urban-dwelling, English-speaking individual property owning constitutional monarchy. (27) The Gaelic Catholic Irish were represented as religiously backward, semi-nomadic rural, collective property-owning feudal and wild, savage people.

Sir John Davies’ ‘A Discovery of True Causes why Ireland was entirely subdued’ (1612) illustrates the interwoven themes of Irishness as a wild, natural force that can be tamed and controlled only by exposure to Englishness. ‘*The lands of the Irish in Ulster*’, he maintains, ‘*were the most rude and unreformed part of Ireland, and the centre of the last great rebellion.*’

*They are now better organised and established, than any of the lands in the other provinces... The organisation of those lands happened with the special providence of God, who cast out those wicked and ungrateful traitors, the enemies of the Reformation in Ireland... His Majesty did not utterly exclude the natives out of this plantation ... but made a mixed plantation of British and Irish, that they might grow up together in one nation. The Irish were in some places transplanted from the woods and mountains into the plains and open countries, that being removed (like wild fruit trees) they might grow the milder, and bear the better and sweeter fruit. When this plantation hath taken root, and been fixed and settled but a few years, with the favour and blessing of God . . . it will secure the peace of Ireland, assure it to the Crown of England for ever; and finally, make it a civil and a rich, a mighty, and a flourishing Kingdom'.*

This post-Ulster rebellion reading of the ultimate failure of the Irish to militarily overcome the Crown forces shows continuity with sixteenth-century writings, which debated the extent to which the Irish were either redeemable or irredeemable. The important thing to observe is that we are dealing with essences that represent entire groups of people: the core element of any definition of racism. Indeed, in the view of most English commentators, the location of Irishness lay between barbarians and 'Wild men' (as illustrated in Spenser's *View*). The former were irredeemable and uncivilizable, while the latter were recoverable by exposure to civilization. The mainstream Old English view, and indeed the thinking behind the Pale itself, was based on the latter. By obliging the wild Irish to follow English rather than Irish customs, they could be civilized then christianized. However, the converse of the cultural in-between state of the 'wild man' was that English colonists could, if they 'went native', degenerate into mere Irish. As an extension of the putative barbarity and wildness of the Irish people, the geography of Ireland was conceptualized as equally wild, alien and dangerous. This anthropomorphic device can be traced all the way back to Giraldus Cambrensis' twelfth-century *Topography and History of Ireland*, and runs through commentaries and writings on Ireland into the seventeenth century.

All of this takes place within the vastly unequal power relationships of the colonial enterprise. The two things are not incidental: the civilizing mission was the official rationale for English involvement in Ireland, and turning the wild men into godly men was at its ideological core. The parameters of the acceptable means to do this altered at different moments. We must therefore be aware that the process of racialization is neither historically linear nor unchanging across time. While the



redeemable/irredeemable discussion is certainly central to the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, there are two important changes of emphasis: one in the second half of the sixteenth century, as New English puritans arrive in Ireland, and another after the Rebellion.

The New English never settled in the Pale before moving on elsewhere, and were intent on amassing land rather than converting souls. The long game of the Pale-based Old English, aimed at acculturation was thus dismissed by the land-obsessed new colonists. It is unsurprising that with such different priorities, religious bases and experiences of Ireland, the dominant ways of seeing and relating to the Gaelic Irish were to alter so abruptly.

Similarly, in the wake of the 1641 rebellion, Pat Coughlan notes the establishment of 'a fanatical quasi-compulsion to keep the Irish away as something foul, a contaminant to English being'. (28) This is spurred by fear of a repeat of the murders of colonists by the rebels, but is overlaid by the previous centuries' alluvial accumulation of ideological material used to racialize the Irish. By the 1650s, even the most liberal lines of argument posited by English colonists, such as that of Vincent Gookin, she asserts, envisage the ultimate culturally cannibalistic 'incorporation' of the Irish into the English body (29).

Language, customs, female property inheritance laws and dress codes are all singled out in the work of English commentators such as Campion, Smith, Moryson and Davies in Canny's crucial period from 1569 to the 1610s. Yet it is not only the fact that Irish property-ownership is not uniformly individual, it is the lack of industry in the indigenous devoted to developing land that constitutes the problem. Indeed, this line of reasoning went as far as the deployment of the concept of *res nullis*, used to argue that Irish unproductivity authorized the takeover of land. (30) Semi-nomadic transhumance farming was low enough on the scale of civilization to link the Gaelic Irish to the Scythians and Tartars (two benchmarks of barbarity in Renaissance Europe that shared such practices). The next rung up the ladder involved mineral extraction, and in Gerald Boate's *Ireland's Naturall History* (1652), their failure to accomplish this level of productive activity is evidence of what Coughlan summarizes as 'pathological sloth'. A key notion in the Puritan lexicon is the necessity for industry: to turn time into output. Spenser's Irenius in *The View*, argues Warley, 'insists upon tillage as synonymous with civilization'. (31) Indeed, the observed continuing failure of the Irish to transform fallow soil into profitable working land fuels the post-1641 English backlash against Irishness. Meiksins Wood suggests that the objective of the colonists was to reproduce the land relations of

South-East England in the face of disorder (32). Indeed, she sees the link between improvement and settlement as crucial in the development of colonial relations: 'The imperial legitimacy of the colonial power was rooted in the productive activities of its subjects, its 'improving' settlers' (33). She goes on to note the blurring of the line between State and private interests in colonial productivity.

Moreover, the line between Irish and American colonies is distinctly blurred, not only in terms of the personnel but the continuity of ideas about the merits of English and indigenous cultures. A number of writers have argued forcefully that the Irish experience was used as a learning opportunity for plantation and settler colonization of the New World. Comparing the Irish with Native Americans became part of the cultural economy of the early British colonial enterprise (34).

I will leave the work of drawing a neat flow-chart elucidating the exact relationship between the material and the cultural contexts of the racialization of the Irish in Early Modern Ireland for another day. However, my argument is not that the material base determines the ideological superstructure, any more than Engels seems to think that it was his and Marx's (35): there is a more complex interplay between them than this. My argument is, instead, that in the English colonization and re-conquest of Ireland, the cultural content of backwardness is projected onto the Catholic Gaelic Irish as a pretext for, and post-facto legitimization of, exploitation, transforming it into what Mills terms 'racial exploitation'. All the ideological and discursive functions of racism existed without the phenotypical element that would become constitutive in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the 'lesser race' status of the Irish in Protestant English eyes legitimizes expropriation of land, and later, genocidal violence. The English colonization of Ireland thus witnessed racism without 'race', in the period prior to the founding of the American colonies (both on the American continent and in the Caribbean), which developed coevally with what is seen as the period when racism originated in America (36).

### *III Contemporary setting*

There is plenty that a historian of 'race' could get his or her teeth into in the period between the Cromwellian re-conquest and the last decade or so of Irish history. My choice of the contemporary period is made in order to demonstrate that the country's

experiences of racialization are, once again, illustrative of macro-level changes in the understandings of 'race' and functions of racialization. Since 1996, the Republic of Ireland has been transformed into a country of net immigration. Neo-liberal governance, very low corporation tax and an aggressive recruitment of FDI have made Ireland a magnet for multinational corporations (37). These have produced dramatic economic growth and drawn migrant workers from across the world. The State's response shows the contemporary paradigm of the 'racial State', professing multiculturalism and official equality discourses while introducing new racialized shifts in the access to rights and resources. These changes have also thrown up two further twists in the story of 'race': the renovation of whiteness and its reconstruction of borders, and the return of the notion of non-productivity as an important vector of difference between mainstream and marginalized groups (both migrants and indigenous minorities).

Among the variety of social phenomena to emerge in recent Irish history are those that locate it on the global map for the first time as a destination for both chain migration and sex trafficking, for example (38). The latest Census figures (2006) indicate that 14.68% of the Republic's population is foreign born. (39) The vast majority of these (78%) are Europeans (many from the UK, and many from the former Eastern bloc). While the majority of immigrants are white, there are relatively small but growing communities from West Africa, Latin America and Asia. Some of these groups have been added to by people gaining refugee or associated status.

The State's response to the questioning of Irish identity that has been a direct corollary of this momentous social change for a country whose national vision of itself has been of a country of emigration, an 'emigrant nursery' (40), can be understood in two connected strands: the establishment of a pro-equality discourse, and the introduction of increasingly restrictive and exclusive legislation on immigration and citizenship.

First a brief word on the political culture of the Republic of Ireland. It has been argued elsewhere (41) that Ireland has no organized far-right politics chiefly for historical reasons to do with the development of the State. The core parties (Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael) are populist, paternalist and nationalist, leaving only slim ideological margins both for the organized Left (very weak compared to European norms), and conversely, for the Far right. Only since 1997, when Fianna Fáil began to govern in coalition with the small but influential Progressive Democrats (committed to liberalization of trade), has Ireland moved toward being a neo-liberal regime (42). This is a notable change of tack that has

framed the response to migration. The other key factor apart from this is an ethnic and racial national identity forged in pre-independence and early state experience (i.e. of the 1920s and 30s) (43). The precise political context is one of dominant neo-liberal, populist nationalism, which facilitates the transmission of the message that growth is good for everyone, regardless of the costs.

The State's response has at all times been the product of its relationship with the European Union. A directive on transposing equality legislation into national law prompted the State's sponsorship of 'interculturalism' (a form of multiculturalism where the existence of unequal distribution of power is recognized as a starting point), through a body to monitor racism and introduce anti-racist initiatives, the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI). Following from the passage of the first of two main pieces of legislation on equality, in 1998 and 2000, the government also set up a monitoring body, the Equality Authority, to oversee the Acts' implementation (44). The state's official anti-racism, chiefly enacted through engagement via these two semi-state agencies, positions it within the European mainstream: all EU member-states must have equality legislation and sponsor initiatives aiming to tackle racism and other discriminatory practices.

On the other hand, looking only at visa regimes and citizenship, the practices of the State show that racialization is ongoing. From a neo-liberal perspective, immigration is primarily about managing the relationship between supply and demand, and ensuring that it does not bring deleterious consequences, either through a mismatch of supply, or through illegal activities. The Irish visa regime, whilst being relatively flexible, aims at the German *gastarbeiter* model in that it seeks to keep the granting of residence and the right to work to a minimum period, and to enable the employer -rather than the employee- to control the visas. Already constrained by its membership of the EU to offer uncontrolled entry and settlement to the nationals of other member states, Ireland has attempted to control that migration stream over which it does have leverage, i.e. migration from outside the EU. Although presented as merely an administrative *fait d'accompli*, this situation is part of a Europe-wide racialization of immigration (45) in which the most important border in terms of entry, residence, access to work and social security is nationality, split into two identities; EU and non-EU (or 'Third Country') Nationals, which has been developing since the mid-80s.

The main tool for controlling migration has been the capacity to alter the criteria for obtaining a work permit. Since 2003, the state employment agency, FAS, has been

assessing the changing needs of the market, and feeding back into policy by prioritizing and deprioritizing areas of work. From 2004, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has been instructing companies to recruit primarily from the so-called EU Accession states (46), i.e. those who became members of the EU in 2004, and only when this has proved unsuccessful can they search further afield. The options for reducing the numbers of migrants are concentrated therefore, on those non-EU nationals from the East, as well as those from other continents, disproportionately affecting developing world nationals.

Moreover, this managerial and discriminatory set of practices has been brought to bear on Irish citizenship also in recent years. The Citizenship Act, 2005 amended the rules for becoming an Irish citizen. The story of the 2004 referendum and the issues it encompasses have been extensively dealt with elsewhere (47) so I will focus only on the most pertinent aspect: the shrinking of the civic qualification path vis-à-vis the ethnic one. Just as the visa regime sought to regulate the entry and conditions for residence and employment of non-EU nationals, the new Citizenship Act regulates the access to *citizenship* of children born in Ireland to non-EU parents. Prior to the 2005 Act, a child born on the island of Ireland was Irish by birth, through the *jus soli* route established at the foundation of the State, and enshrined in the 1937 Constitution. The amendment made in the Act set different criteria for children whose *parents* were non-nationals. The only nationals who would be interested in their child having Irish citizenship rather than their own are those from outside the EU (who obtain major benefits in terms of access to work through the ensuing long-term resident status). This is because according to pre-2005 practice, the foreign parents of Irish children were granted discretionary leave to remain (under a Supreme Court ruling from 1989) in order to guarantee that the Irish citizen was afforded the right to enjoy family life. Those parents could then accrue enough residence in Ireland to enable them to apply for citizenship further down the line.

In 2003, the incoming Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell challenged two such applications for residence in the Supreme Court and won the case. (48) After the referendum citizenship legislation was amended. A child born in Ireland to 'non-national' parents could not obtain Irish citizenship *unless* the parents had been living in the country for a minimum of three years. None of the other rules were altered. So, in practice, the right to Irish citizenship *through birth* no longer applied to all children, but only to those with an Irish parent, or whose non-Irish parents had lived there for three years (time

spent as an asylum-seeker was not counted). On the other hand, people who could establish one Irish grandparent, but who had never been to Ireland could still obtain citizenship through their bloodline. The distinction between *jus soli* (rights through birthplace) and *jus sanguinis* (rights through ancestry) was thus tilted toward the latter, making Irishness more reliant on an ethnic than a civic conception of membership.

Minister McDowell states in his article in the *Irish Times* before the referendum that: 'It (the amendment) won't be racist; and anyone who supports discrimination based on ethnic characteristics should vote against it because there's nothing in it for them' (49). However stark the discriminatory outcomes of the new Citizenship Act, the State's official anti-racism was inoculation against the charge. Yet this restriction solely impacts non-EU nationals, aimed at making it more difficult for them to access resources and rights. Indeed. Discourse in Ireland still veers between explicit racism and official anti-racism, and when people talk about difference, the same resource-based anxieties are evinced as in the UK and North American literature. (50)

### Productivity in Contemporary Ireland

The other area in which the historical themes have returned through the new configuration of globalized capital and labor is through the trope of productivity. The indigenous Irish nomadic minority, Travellers, have been in Ireland for centuries. They are ostensibly white, but racialized culturally as dirty, backward, lazy, thieving and above all, beyond the reach of the mainstream economy (i.e. non-productive members of the nation). Travellers fare poorly on all socio-economic indicators and have been the subject of state attempts to assimilate or eliminate them culturally since the 1960s (51). As land prices have skyrocketed in Ireland, tripling in the 1995-2005 period, the premium on the unused land at the margins of urban areas has also risen. These are places through which Travellers traditionally passed and settled, between town and country. However, once the ethos of work and productivity induced by the economic boom that was labeled the 'Celtic Tiger' became the norm, the claims of Travellers to equality were undermined. The priority was for land to be made productive. So, like the semi-nomadic Gaelic Irish in the early modern period, Travellers were seen as a throwback, incapable of improving land, only of dirtying and disordering it, and keeping it out of production. This irony has not escaped Travellers. Activist Sinéad Ní Shuínéar (52) argues that the anti-Traveller

racism in contemporary Ireland is a continuity of the colonial view which revolves around hierarchical degrees of civilization.

While Travellers are seen as competing for land (53), asylum-seekers, the other whipping boys of the 'Celtic Tiger', are perceived as competitors for work, space and social security. Similarly unproductive (because legally prohibited from taking paid work), and often from outside Europe, asylum-seekers saw themselves racialized, criminalized and blamed for urban decline, planning blight, sex trafficking, etc. The racialization of Travelers and asylum-seekers in contemporary Ireland is clearly what Etienne Balibar was talking about when he coined the term 'crisis racism' (54): the interesting point is, however, that Ireland's economy was expanding, not contracting, and not in crisis.

To conclude, the specificity of the racialization of Irishness in the 1990s and 2000s is due to the combination of a neo-liberal and nationalist administration that has been able to attract large amounts of foreign direct investment and manage a restrictive migration regime whose parameters are drawn from the overarching EU-level intergovernmental agreements on the basic criteria. The element that can actually be controlled by national governments is immigration from outside the EU, and this is where the ideological work has been carried out: in restricting access to the labor market for the mainly non-white nationals of the world outside the borders of the EU. At the same time, the trope of productivity, reconfigured in specific Irish conditions of hyper-mobile global capital and less mobile labor, now circulates in relation to Travellers and asylum-seekers -four and a half centuries after it was first significant in dividing populations hierarchically into groups in Ireland.

## Analysis

The two points of Irish history that I have identified as being important in terms of the history of 'race' are separated by 400-450 years. I argue that they illustrate different chapters in the public discourse of 'race' in the West: first, an embryonic stage when there is racism without 'race', and second, the contemporary norm, in which there is 'racism without racists'.

Discussions of the origin of racism range from naturalizing it, as in the stream of social psychology work on prejudice, beginning with Allport, to precise ideological and technical arguments about Enlightenment ideas irrevocably linking bodies to culture (55). The growth of racism has since been tied by scholars to the development of systems of

parallel, inter-dependent systems of free and un-free labor (the plantation mode of production). According to the former, all societies have ways of making distinctions between 'us' and 'them', in-groups and out-groups, and it is, within reason, necessary for survival: an *excess* of prejudice is the realm of the deviant individual. According to the latter, capitalism gave birth to racism as the system's hierarchy in the phase of European expansion was legitimized by reference to 'race'.

My interpretation tips toward the 'capitalism-begat-racism' school, but stops short of it for the following reason. The case of Ireland demonstrates that the things that racism can do, such as control the movement of bodies, mark them as less human, and available for death, (56) can also be done by reference solely to cultural distinctions in a colonial context. The material framework is of theft of land and the associated system that turned Irish labor into English profit, with a landlord class accruing the financial advantages. This precedes Enlightenment texts that enshrine the idea of the body as key to culture within a hierarchical chain of being (57). It also predates to some extent the establishment of the American colonies, although not the Spanish conquest of what is now Latin America. In brief, if the period of expanding colonialism sees the origin of racism, then Ireland's experience must lie at the early part of that. If the origin of racism in the Americas lies in the slave plantations and the period which ended with the categorical distinction between free and un-free labor corresponding to skin color (no white person could be a slave) (58), then the Irish experience predates it.

The nineteenth century's obsession with somatic differences and the construction of pseudo-scientific hierarchies based on particular differences has, I feel, distorted the discursive field and established body-centric racism as the norm. If however we see Ireland as the first place where racism is structurally constitutive of colonialism, then some recalibration of our tools for analysis is required. The bodies of the protagonists in the power relations of racism do not have to be so different in complexion, hair type, nose, eye and lip shape, or whatever minimal set of characteristics is accepted as being 'racial'. The English and Irish were indistinguishable physically, just as sedentary Irish, Travellers and Eastern European migrants are in twenty-first century Ireland. Yet the ideological labor of racialization works at the level of culture: it tags bodies as pathologically inclined to particular collective behaviors.

In terms of the contemporary period, a number of lessons can be learned from the Irish case. In Europe, whiteness has internal and external borders. The racialization of white Europeans in each other's countries is a centuries-old practice. The impact of



movements of global capital and membership of the EU is that countries that were once on the economic periphery of Europe are now part of its core: the periphery has moved East and South, beyond Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece. Those countries are all now countries of immigration. Their evolving economies are generating new forms of old discriminatory practices that run parallel to the frequent public assertions of commitment to equality which seek to undermine any interpretation of racism by critics as unfounded, except when applied to far-right parties (the 'deviant individuals'). The 'tagging' referred to above can mean the difference between life and death, as racist attacks continue against Travellers and European migrants in Ireland. (59) Indeed, the discourse is specifically not about 'race', but about culture and administrative responsibilities (the justifications for the citizenship amendments in the Republic), not to mention the imperative of productivity: from improved tillage in the sixteenth century to literally serving and catering to the 'Celtic Tiger's' Irish consumers.

So Ireland's history, far from being de-racialized and exceptional, is actually exceptional in the opposite sense, in that it provides a more complex and nuanced way of understanding the evolution of 'race' through racialization. By understanding the experiences of Ireland, we avoid being sidetracked by color as the only possible locus of whatever 'race' means at a given time and place. The Irish experience might also make us wonder whether the nineteenth-century obsession with physical differences is the blip in the story of the racialization of the world's population. I suggest that the continuity within that narrative is provided by a fetishization of culture and the embodiment of cultural difference, dating back to the English colonization of Ireland.

## Notes

1. A very brief but nonetheless useful coverage is however presented by Bill Rolston and Jim Shannon's *How Racism Came to Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2002)
2. W.E.H. Lecky's treatment, pp. 396-402 of *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972) is a demonstration of this.
3. Robbie McVeigh, 'The Specificity of Irish Racism', *Race and Class* 33(40), 1992, 31-45. Notable in the new corpus are Ronit Lentin, 'The Racialization of Irishness', *Sociological Research Online*. Vol. 5, 2001; Bryan Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); and the two work of McVeigh and Lentin, (eds.) *Racism and Antiracism in Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2002), and *After Optimism: Ireland, Racism and Globalization* (Dublin: Metro Eireann, 2006).

4. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without racists: color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).
5. See Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race* (London: Tavistock, 1977), for the former and Ann Phoenix, 'Remembered Racialization: young people and positioning in differential understandings', in Karim Murji and John Solomos (eds). *Racialization: studies in theory and practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 103-22, for the latter.
6. Mathew Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
7. Stephen Small, *Racialized Boundaries: the black experience in the United States and England in the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1994)
8. Michael Omi, 'The Changing Meaning of Race', in Neil Smelser, William Julius Wilson, and Faith Mitchell (eds). *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2001, 243-263), 244.
9. Small, *Racialized Boundaries*, 30.
10. Patrick Wolfe, "Race and Racialization: some thoughts' *Postcolonial Studies*, 5(1), 2002: 51-62, quote from p. 58.
11. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*.
12. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
13. David Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Boston: Blackwell, 2001); Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (London: Allen Lane, 2004).
14. Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: the politics of liberation* (New York: Random House, 1967).
15. Geoffrey Keating, *History of Ireland* (1725).
16. David Parker and Miri Song, 'New ethnicities online: reflexive racialisation and the internet', *The Sociological Review* 54 (3), 2006: 575–594.
17. Heather Dalmage, *Tripping on the Color Line: Black-White Multicultural Families in a Divided World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Karyn Lacy, *Blue Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class*. (Chichester; John Wiley and Sons, 2007).
18. *Political Affairs*, 3/28/06. Accessible at <http://www.politicalaffairs.net/article/view/3067/1/42> (accessed 04/02/08).
19. James Barrett and David Roediger, 'Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 1997:3-44; *International Labor and Working Class History* No. 60 Fall 2001 'Scholarly controversy: whiteness and

- the historians' Imagination'; Tom Guglielmo, 'Rethinking Whiteness Historiography: the Case of Italians in Chicago, 1890-1945' in Ashley Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (eds), *White Out: the continuing significance of racism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 49-61.
20. Robert Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour* (London: Routledge, 1982); Bruce Armstrong, 'Racialisation and Nationalist Ideology: The Japanese Case', *International Sociology*, 4(3), 1989, 329-343; Rohit Barot and John Bird, 'Racialization: the genealogy and critique of a concept', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24(4), 2001, 601-18; Steve Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience* (London: Pluto, 2003).
21. The birth of racism, as we shall see below, is located in the sixteenth-century American colonies, or a long time ago in China, see Frank Dikotter, *The construction of racial identities in China and Japan*, (University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).
22. Charles Mills, 'Racial Exploitation and the Wages of Whiteness' in George Yancy (ed), *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 25-54.
23. Nicholas Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1976)
24. Mark McCarthy, 'Historical geographies of a colonised world: the renegotiation of New English colonialism in early modern urban Ireland, c.1600-10', *Irish Geography* 36(1): 59-76, 2003.
25. Mills, 'Racial Exploitation and the Wages of Whiteness', 41-2.
26. Ibid., 46.
27. See summaries of historians' work in Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience*, and Jane Ohlmeyer, 'A Laboratory for Empire: Early Modern Ireland and English Imperialism' in Kevin Kenny (ed) *The Irish and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 26.
28. Patricia Coughlan, 'Counter-currents in colonial discourse: the political thought of Vincent and Daniel Gookin', in Jayne Ohlmeyer (ed.) *Political Thought in Seventeenth-century Ireland: kingdom or colony?* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) 2000, 77.
29. Ibid., 76-77.
30. Edward Campion, *A Historie of Ireland: written in the year 1571*; Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, 1583; Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, 1595; John Davies, *A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued*, 1612; Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 1617. The use of *res nullis* in the 1580s is explored in Canny's *Making Ireland British, 1580-1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 133-34).

31. Patricia Coughlan, 'Cheap and Common Animals': the English anatomy of Ireland in the seventeenth century', in Thomas Healy and Jonathan Sawday (eds.) *Literature and the English Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 205-26), 213; Christopher Warley, "So plenty makes me poore": Ireland, Capitalism, and Class in Spenser's *Amoretti and Epithalamion*' in *ELH* 69(3), 2002, 567-598.
32. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2003), 82.
33. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Origins of Capitalism: a longer view* (New York: Verso, 2002), 164.
34. Inter alia, David Quinn, *The Elizabethans and the Irish* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1966); Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland*; Patricia Coughlan, 'Counter-currents in colonial discourse: the political thought of Vincent and Daniel Gookin' in Jane Ohlmeyer (ed.) *Political thought in seventeenth-century Ireland: kingdom or colony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 56-82; Peter Harrison, "Fill the Earth and Subdue it": Biblical Warrants for Colonization in Seventeenth-Century England', *Journal of Religious History*, 29(1), 2005, 3-24.
35. Friedrich Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 475. The pertinent quote reads: 'According to the materialist conception of history, the determining element in history is ultimately production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into an abstract, meaningless and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure ... also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*'.
36. Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974).
37. Denis O'Hearn, *Inside the Celtic Tiger: The Irish Economy and the Asian Model* London: Pluto, 1998); Peadar Kirby, *The Celtic Tiger in Distress: Growth with Inequality in Ireland* (London: Palgrave, 2001); Kieran Allen, *The Myth of the Celtic Tiger* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience*. The principal engine of growth in the Irish economy since the mid-1990s has been the investment of multinational corporations in the computer software, pharmaceuticals and data processing industries, and the outcomes of this have been rapid, striking, and socially and geographically uneven. Amidst rising levels of wealth and consumer spending are also patterns of increasing polarization of wealth, and areas that appear to have been largely

bypassed by the economic frenzy affecting the Greater Dublin areas, and to a lesser extent, Cork and Galway.

38. See Ronit Lentin's chapter on foreign women, Irish men, the State and sex trafficking in Lentin and McVeigh, *After Optimism*.

39. The 2006 Census records that 14.68% of the 4.1 million population of the Republic is foreign born, a high figure for the EU (cf. 2005 figures for France, 8.4%; UK, 9.7%; Sweden, 12.4%. OEDC, 2005). However 10.5% of the 14.68% (i.e. 71% of the foreign-born population) are EU nationals, and only 1% are from Africa; 1.3% from Asia; and less than 1% from the Americas.

40. Jim Mc Laughlin, *Ireland: the Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy*, Cork: Cork U.P., 1995).

41. Steve Garner, 'Ireland and immigration: explaining the absence of the far right' *Patterns of Prejudice* 41(2), 2007, 109-30.

42. Gary Murphy, 'Assessing the relationship between neoliberalism and political corruption: the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrat coalition, 1997-2006', *Irish Political Studies*, 21(3), 2006, 297-317.

43. Steven Loyal, 'Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the state', in Colin Coulter and Steve Coleman (eds), *The End of Irish History?*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, 74-94), 75.

44. The NCCRI is at: <<http://www.nccri.ie/index.html>>; The Equality Authority is at: <<http://www.equality.ie/>>.

45. Steve Garner, 'The EU and the racialization of immigration, 1985-2006', *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, 1(1), 2007, 61-87.

46. All employers wishing to recruit a non-EU worker must prove that the vacancy has been publicized for a set period and that all no EU nationals applying were adequately qualified. The Accession States are: Czech Republic; Estonia; Hungary; Latvia; Lithuania; Poland; Slovakia; Slovenia; Cyprus and Malta.

47. Eithne Lubhéid, 'Childbearing against the state? Asylum seeker women in the Irish republic', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27(4), 2004, 335-349; Ronit Lentin, 'From Racial State to Racist State: Ireland on the Eve of the Citizenship Referendum' *Variation* 20, 2004 ; Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh, *After Optimism*; Steve Garner, *Whiteness: an Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), "Babies, Bodies and Entitlement: gendered aspects of access to citizenship in the Republic of Ireland', *Parliamentary Affairs* 60(3), 2007, 137-51; Siobhán Mulally, 'Children, citizenship and constitutional change' in

- Fanning, *Immigration*, 2007), 27-46; Silvia Brandi, 'Unveiling the Ideological Construction of the 2004 Irish Citizenship Referendum: A Critical Discourse Analytical Approach', *Translocations* 1(2), (<http://www.translocations.ie/currentissue/volume1issue2-3.pdf>)>
48. The Supreme Court ruling of January 2003 upheld the Minister of Justice's appeal against granting residence rights to two couples (one Nigerian and one Czech) on the basis of having a child born in Ireland (i.e. an Irish child under the existing legislation).
49. Michael McDowell, 'Yes' *Irish Times*, [http://www.ireland.com/focus/referendum2004/for\\_1.html](http://www.ireland.com/focus/referendum2004/for_1.html)
50. Bríd Ní Chonail, 'The Impact of Migrants on Resources: A Critical Assessment of the Views of People Working/Living in the Blanchardstown Area', *Translocations*, 1(2), 2007 [<http://www.translocations.ie/volume1issue2/volume1issue2-5.htm>]
51. See the information sheets available from Irish Travellers' umbrella organization, Pavee Point at: < [http://www.paveepoint.ie/pav\\_info\\_a.html](http://www.paveepoint.ie/pav_info_a.html)>.
52. Sinéad Ní Shuínéar, 'Othering the Irish (Travellers)' in Lentin and McVeigh (eds.) *Racism and Antiracism in Ireland*, 177-192.
53. There has also been legislation that criminalizes the nomadic aspect of Traveller culture: the 1998 Accommodation Act, Section 32; and the Amendment to the Criminal Justice Act 2002 make trespass a criminal (rather than a civil) offence.
54. Etienne Balibar, 'Racism and Crisis' in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: ambiguous identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 217-227.
55. Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954); Emmanuel Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment: a reader* (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1997).
56. Michel Foucault, *Society must be defended*, speaks of the State's power to 'keep alive' and 'let die'.
57. Emmanuel Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment*.
58. George Frederickson, *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Racism and Social Inequality* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); Cheryl Harris, 'Whiteness as Property' *Harvard Law Review* 106(8), 1993, 1707-93.
59. As I write this paper, I read an article on the murder of a Polish worker in Ireland, the second, whose death draws an official denial of racism as a motive. Katrina Goldstone, 'Racist violence in Ireland' *IRR NEWS* [<http://www.irr.org.uk/2008/march/ha000035.html>>] 28.3.08.