

‘All I have to do is dream?’ Re-greening Irish integrationism ¹

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Introduction: ‘All I have to do is dream?’

Afternoon on St. Patrick’s Day 2009, Dublin 6. Outside the green-fronted pub, ‘Madisons’ in Rathmines, groups of youngsters in leprechaun hats, cheeks painted with shamrocks and tricolours, down post-recession beers to a loud rendition of the Everly Brothers 1958 song, ‘Dream, dream, dream, dream... All I have to do is drea-ea-ea-eam...’ The blaring dream song makes me think about dreaming while sinking.

David Theo Goldberg begins his *The Racial State* (Goldberg, 2002) by noting that racial theory has become ‘awfully weary’ of late. Not only does it ‘trade in and on a clichéd vocabulary, repeated uncritically’, but also ‘those of us engaged in critically theorising racial concepts and racist expressions’ know we are in trouble when the language of analysis which turns up unself-consciously on prime time TV denotes ‘not so much critical acceptance as the blunting edge of appropriation’ (Goldberg, 2002: 1).

Contemporary Ireland ² had moved from the discovery – during the 1997 European Year against Racism – that racism is indeed an Irish problem, to euphemisms such as interculturalism, transculturalism, integration and cultural diversity. Up until the last throes of Celtic capitalism, the dominant narrative was one of failed European multiculturalism and the suggestion that ‘we’ were getting it right while other EU states were getting bogged down in assimilationism and multiculturalism – both seen as failed migrant integration technologies. However, as the economy sinks, these discourses have totally disappeared from the public radar, as integration and immigration become vague memories of better times, or discourses of renewed competition for what are clearly scarce resources. At the same time, race and racism are becoming unspeakable, spoken only by the white, settled, Christian Irish advocates of solidarity and ‘interculturalism’, making no space for the racialised to partake in the antiracist conversation.

As early as 2002 I theorised Irish multiculturalism as disavowing Ireland’s traumatic emigration past (Lentin, 2002: 235). The image of Ireland as an emigrant nursery becoming an in-migration destination has been repeated ad nauseum since the mid-1990s as the Irish vision of failed multiculturalism and its lessons framed official Ireland’s ‘integration strategy and diversity management’ (Lenihan, 2008), seen as what was cynically called in another context and another era ‘an Irish solution to an Irish problem’.

As the interculturalism industry has more or less folded, my current research points to new articulations of integration from below, as migrants, strategically appropriating *and* disrupting state parlance, make integration work in new and exciting ways.

Turbans and veils: Doing it ‘our way’

Irish integration policies were articulated by the minister specifically appointed to the task as a ‘two way street involving rights and duties’, aimed, at ‘those migrants who reside, work and in particular those who aspire to be Irish citizens’ (Lenihan, 2008: 10). Such smooth talk made no reference to changes in citizenship laws in the wake of the 2004 Citizenship Referendum which substituted the *jus soli* automatic citizenship accorded to all people born in the island of Ireland for *jus sanguinis* citizenship entitlement reserved for children of citizen parents (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006).

Robbie McVeigh and I interpret the Citizenship Referendum as a turning point in the racialisation of Irishness. By contrast, in *New Guests of the Irish Nation* (2009), Bryan Fanning explicitly shifts from understanding the responses to immigration in 21st century Ireland as occasioned by racism to focusing on the rather dubious Goodhart-style post-multiculturalism theory of ‘ethnic nepotism’ as posing a risk to social cohesion. For Fanning the Referendum was due to the ‘distributional anxieties’ shaped by past economic fatalism, coming to a head in the prosperous era of the (now defunct) ‘Celtic Tiger’. Refusing to allow state racism as constructing immigrants, paradoxically, as both economic commodities addressing labour shortages, and economic burden, Fanning regards state-led distinctions between Irish nationals and ‘non-national’ immigrants, as responses to genetically-based ‘ethnic nepotism’.

To illustrate the ‘current state of Irish integrationism and the confusion around the narratives of crisis I use the example of the Garda turban debate. In 2007 An Garda Síochána, having appealed for recruits from Ireland’s ‘new communities’ – a common euphemism to describe migrants arriving since the 1990s – refused to allow a Sikh volunteer to the Garda reserve force to wear his turban on duty. Denying that the ban was based on race or religion, the Garda insisted it was a question of providing an ‘impartial police service’ requiring, among other things, ‘our standard uniform and dress’ (O’Brien, 2007). At the same time it refused to rule out the wearing of Catholic religious symbols such as crucifixes, ashes and pioneer pins. For Fintan O’Toole (2007) it was a question of ‘all or nothing’ – either adopting a ‘no religious symbols in public’ ruling across the board, including Catholic religious symbols and practices – his preferred option, or allowing all religious symbols, including turbans and veils.

The turban ban was another important turning point, as, in support of the Garda stance, ministers demonstrated confusion about the narrative of crisis, claiming both the need for migrants to ‘*assimilate* into our own culture and own norms in society’ and warning that Ireland needed ‘to *learn from the mistakes of others* in relation to the whole issue of integration. It’s something we’re coming a little bit late to’ (Minister for Foreign Affairs, cited in O’Brien, 2007).

Antiracism, lived experience and the return of the repressed

In *The Threat of Race*, Goldberg charts the shift from antiracism to antiracialism. Academics, he argues, were asked ‘to give up on race before and without addressing the legacy, the roots, the scars of racism’s histories, the weights of race’. Instead of antiracism – social movements committed to transforming the racial status quo – we got a post-race antiracialism, also called, variously, multiculturalism, interculturalism, integration. Yet giving up on the word, the category of race, does not mean doing away with the conditions for which those terms stand (Goldberg, 2009: 21). The examples cited below illustrate the post race culturalist policy discourse dominating the Irish response to the continuing scourge of racism.

In the October 2008 Immigrant Council of Ireland discussion on the challenges of integration in post Celtic Tiger Ireland, Danny McCoy, Director of Policy with IBEC, spoke of migrants as one of the engines of Ireland’s economic boom. Businesses, McCoy said, are interested in migrants as customers, not workers, as migration brought about *cultural diversity and segmentation*, both fuelling market growth. McCoy’s use of the term ‘cultural diversity’, and the absence of concepts such as racism or discrimination denote the use of culture to solve problems that previously were the domain of politics and economics (Yúdice, 2003).

However, cultural differences mask racial differences, just as the census ‘ethnic question’ masked racial differences as respondents were asked to tick their ‘ethnicity’ as ‘white’, ‘black’, ‘black Irish’, ‘Asian’, ‘Traveller’ or ‘other’ (Chiyoko King O’Riain, 2008). The collapse of economics and politics into culture means not the expansion of civil society, but its extinction (Yudice, 2003). In the Irish case, the rhetoric of diversity and interculturalism by official players masks, but does not eradicate, the realities of racialisation. When culture becomes both object and instrument of governmentalities, and when the ‘culturalist turn’ means denying that racism forms an integral part of state control over incoming migrants and existing minorities, diversity and integration become the currency of the race relations industry.

A year after the ICI cultural diversity event, in October 2009, the Equality Authority and the European Network against Racism organised an expert discussion forum on ‘Tackling racism and the impact of racist stereotypes’. The event, hosting academics, members of NGOs, some of whom were themselves migrants, Travellers and members of minorities, aimed to identify ‘best practices and tools to address racism including racism arising from stereotypes’, though stereotypes were not explicitly addressed.

Most crucially, none of the speakers was a member of a migrant or minority group. The keynote speaker was Anastasia Crickley, a long time anti-racist campaigner for Traveller and minority rights, and chairperson of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (formerly the EU Monitoring Centre against Racism, Antisemitism and Xenophobia). Crickley listed four reasons for addressing racism: charity, cohesion, economics and ethics, but did not mention the politics of antiracism, or the role of the state in perpetrating racism. In the Equality Authority’s background document, ‘Living Together: European Citizenship against Racism and Xenophobia, Best Practices Report: Ireland’, the best practices listed

for Ireland focused on interculturalism and cultural diversity, not antiracism. It is indicative that twelve years after the European Year against Racism, racism in Ireland is still spoken about in terms of cultural diversity, making no space for the lived experiences or analysis of racism by the racialised.

In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (1963 [1992]) emphasised the self-definition of racialised subjects – crucially rejecting the status of objecthood to which racial discourse confine them – as the fundamental condition of a politics of emancipation. What is really central to his discussion, especially in the chapter titled ‘The facts of Blackness’³ is the notion of self-definition and the struggle of the black man to formulate a ‘subjectivity’ above and outside the white imagination. This is particularly relevant considering that identity, interculturalism and all the white vocabulary of diversity management negates any attempts of the racialised to define their problems and positions. Yet contemporary academic and policy makers’ preoccupation with ‘culture’, ‘identity’, ‘interculturalism’ and ‘diversity’ as the sole positions of the struggle of racialised people leads to the conflation of ‘identity politics’ with antiracism and to the depoliticisation of the antiracist struggle. As Goldberg has it: ‘if antiracist commitment requires remembering and recalling, antiracism suggests forgetting, getting over, moving on... rather than recounting and redressing of the terms of humiliation and devaluation’ (Goldberg, 2009: 21).

Remember, however, that one of the most important questions asked in relation to antiracism is ‘who speaks for whom, who says what and from where?’ As Alana Lentin argues (2008) antiracism can be either generalised – intending to raise awareness among the population and reach a post-racial ‘racelessness’, or colour blindness. Or it can be self-representational, where the lived experience of the racialised informs the struggle. Generalist antiracism is anchored in universal values such as charity, tolerance, democracy, human rights, and equality; it occludes state racism and emphasises individual (or at times institutional) prejudice. In contrast, self organizing antiracism stresses the role of the state, focusing on notions of the race idea rooted in the political structure. The lived experience of the protagonists informs the struggle and names the state as the main culprit rather than stress individual prejudice, a way of depoliticizing racism and antiracism.

Not privileging the experiences of the racialised means nothing much has changed. Antiracism in Ireland continues to be solidaristic, performed by well meaning white, settled, Christian Irish people, whose ‘best practices’ documents continue in the tradition of soft interculturalism and cultural diversity, while racism goes on.

In *After Optimism?* McVeigh and I documented the transition from ‘combating racism’ to ‘accommodating cultural diversity’ (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006: 176-7), arguing that with the refusal to name and address state racism, ideologies of interculturalism and integration actually become racist, functioning to protect the operation of state racism (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006: 178).

In January 2008, long before the current economic crisis, the Minister for Integration posited both ‘a strong economy’ and ‘a willingness to learn from other countries’ mistakes’ as essential for integration and for averting ‘an anti-immigrant backlash’ (MacCormaic, 2008). Highlighting the economic contribution by immigrants, he argued for a ‘*properly managed* immigration’ (which includes making it increasingly difficult for asylum seekers to present their applications, and keeping thousands of asylum seekers in holding camps) (Lenihan, 2008: 8).

It is ironic that some of the first budget cuts made by a government keen to ‘mainstream’ integration by ‘managing’ diversity, building on ‘progress already achieved in the areas of social inclusion and anti-racism’, included abolishing the government’s own advisory National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI), and cutting the budget of the Equality Authority by 43% and of the Minister for Integration by 26%. These cuts raise questions as to what it is that diversity actually *does*. As the EA October event indicated, diversity and equality are becoming part of a performance and audit culture. Increasingly bureaucratised, diversity becomes an instrument of government which depoliticises inequalities. Thus the performance of cultural diversity becomes a marketing device, a brand, as state bodies, companies, and educational institutions pride themselves on their ‘happy colourful faces’, albeit without relinquishing control of those diversity projects to the owners of these faces.

But with increasing control over migration and asylum quotas cultural diversity becomes a sign of what it is *not*. Thus organisations and states need to ‘diversify’ only when racialised others remain the strangers, the ‘bodies out of place’, illustrating how society and state are orientated around whiteness, around ‘those who are already there’ (Ahmed and Swan, 2006).

So when neo-liberals speak about ‘too much diversity’ and ‘social cohesion’, they are, on one level, undoing diversity, and calling for closer immigration controls. But on another level they are reiterating policies of multiculturalism that see culture as fixed and already there, enabling the state to negotiate with leaders of ‘other cultures’ whose diversity should be managed, mainstreamed, regulated and controlled to suit the interests of the market state, while keeping the voices of the racialised out of the conversation.

Diversity – while initially aimed at racial equality – conceals more than reveals the very whiteness it is meant to counteract. Diversity is thus a marketing ploy, but also an employment sector, from ‘social inclusion’ units to myriad NGOs, mostly led by the locals, for the benefit of ‘these people’ – although very few will survive the current budget cuts which will further marginalise the already marginalised – asylum seekers in holding camps, undocumented and trafficked migrants, Travellers.

Conclusion: Integration from below or the re-greening of Irish integrationism?

We could do African plays, because we can promote African culture, but at the same time we could do plays that talk about ... not only the problems that African people are facing, but problems that anybody in Ireland could be facing, whether you are African or you are Irish (Kunle Animashaun, interview, February 2009).⁴

Economic downturns have an uncanny power of recall with current talk of emigration and belt tightening. The current crisis illustrates how much we have forgotten, how little we have learnt, as we fail to interrogate the ‘we’ that does diversity, the return of the repressed past, long forgotten traumatic events that can no longer evade interrogation (Lentin, 2002: 233). The Madisons pub in Rathmines has closed recently, one of the many businesses not supported by the post-Tiger bust. And the second Minister for Integration seemed too busy with his other brief – anti-drugs policy - to give any attention to integration. The current Junior Minister for Integration, Mary White, also has equality as part of her brief. Meanwhile, migrants, resilient, creative, inventive, enact their own politics of ‘integration from below’, the topic of my research project ‘Migrant networks, facilitating migrant integration’ (www.tcd.ie/immigration/networks/index.php), documenting migrant organisations and networks whose members, despite the economic downturn, resist the temptations of elsewhere, as preliminary research (Bobek, 2009; ERC, 2009) suggests they are not yet ‘going home’.

Our research project demonstrates that the post-migratory practices of migrant networks and associations both strategically appropriate state discourses – in the now desperate hope of securing scarce funds and a place at the table. At the same time they resist these very discourses, which ultimately occlude power inequalities, deny migrants crucial funding and a meaningful independent voice, and appropriate migrants’ intercultural practices so as to bolster the state’s own image of alternative modes of integration, as illustrated by the quote above by Nigerian theatre practitioner Kunle Animashaun, director of Camino de Orula Productions, a company dedicated to showcasing African culture while at the same time addressing Irish social issues.

As post-Tiger Ireland reels at the disastrous news about bank bail outs, budget cuts and house repossession, state celebrations of ‘diversity’, ‘interculturalism’ and ‘integration’ are fast giving way to wet dreams about a not too distant future of an Ireland, green again, white again. Meanwhile, as Animashaun says, migrants are dreaming different dreams:

It would be fantastic if in the case of Ireland, we had different persons, maybe some African persons, maybe someone from Mosney, maybe someone from Balbriggan, maybe some Irish people, some Travellers, some Polish people and they are sitting down and you can’t see that warm attitude at the beginning but if all goes according to plan ... people start to get relaxed, and people are able to be free and tell each other, ‘listen lads’...

Notes:

¹ Thanks to Elena Moreo for her helpful comments on a draft.

² In 'Ireland' I mean here the Republic of Ireland, even though many of the observations relate to both North and South; see chapter 5 in Lentin and McVeigh, 2006.

³ This chapter is mis-translated, it should be 'the lived experience of the black man'.

⁴ Interview carried out by Carla De Tona.

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