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Multi-Culturalism in Ireland:
Examining the Context of and Debates Surrounding the
Citizenship Referendum

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Introduction

Presently, one of the most interesting phenomena in the world is the massive population shift that is occurring on a global level. People are moving across borders in an unprecedented way. There are a number of factors contributing to this widespread movement. First, travel has become less of a burden and less of an expense. In addition, the world is tied together economically as globalization becomes more widespread. The United States and western EU affiliated countries are mainly on the receiving end of this mass migration; the United States has been experiencing this immigration for decades however, many European countries are experiencing heavy immigration for the first time. Though people are immigrating within Europe, the more noticeable immigration is coming from outside of Europe; there are many people from Africa, the Middle East and Asia who are looking to make their home in the west. The reasons for this vary: some are fleeing conflict-ridden countries, some are fleeing economically devastated states and some prefer Europe's democratic governments to their own government. Regardless of the reasons, the arrival of these immigrants is resulting in racial diversity in European countries. Each country is dealing with this newfound diversity in different ways, however Ireland is a special case.

The Celtic tiger has transformed Ireland from an economically depressed state to the second richest country in the EU in only fifteen years. This prosperity is attracting people from all over the world who want to build their lives in Ireland. A consequence of this rapid economic change, is Ireland's rapid social change. Among many of these social changes is the country's transition from a homogenous society to a heterogeneous one. Traditionally, Ireland's people have emigrated, however now the country is playing host to a growing number of immigrants. In

this paper, I hope to explore Irish reactions to multi-culturalism through the highly controversial citizenship referendum. This referendum, through which the twenty-seventh amendment to the Irish Constitution will be made, is fundamentally changing Ireland's citizenship policy from one of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* to one of just *jus sanguinis*. This change has been made amid current inflows of immigrants, many of whom are racially distinct and come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. The framing question for this paper is: **Like other European countries, Ireland is making the transition from a racially homogenous society to a more heterogenous one. In light of this recent shift, how are Irish societal views on multi-culturalism reflected in the debates about citizenship in Ireland and the implications of the Citizenship Referendum?** It is difficult to make a generalizations and conclusions based one facet of Irish multi-culturalism, however based on my research I have provided some insight into Irish society and how it is dealing with its new found racial and cultural diversity. In this paper, I have tried to capture some of the current dialogue surrounding multi-culturalism, citizenship, immigration, Irish identity and racism.

As an African-American woman, I am sensitized to issues surrounding multi-culturalism and diversity. Within my home country, there are continually debates on immigration and diversity. It is generally acknowledged that immigrants are able to do well in the United States. However the social and economic quandary that many African-American's find themselves in is still prevalent. These difficulties are a result of previous state-sponsored segregation policies and entrenched negative attitudes towards minorities that are held by many of the majority. As a result of studying the situation that many African-American's find themselves in, I have become increasingly interested in the minority experience and how different societies deal with multi-culturalism. Additionally, I lived in Europe for ten years of my life and my parents are currently

living in Italy. Thus, I am particularly interested in how Europeans deal with diversity and the growing inflow of immigrants.

The research for this paper has given me a lot of insight into multi-culturalism in Ireland. First, it is important to note that Irish societal views are heavily influenced by the recent prosperity that the country has experienced. The debates on citizenship that occurred before referendum was voted on reflect a lot about multi-culturalism in Ireland. They bring up questions such as; what does it mean to be a citizen; what does it mean to be Irish; and who is entitled to Irish citizenship? The answers to these questions are heavily disputed in the debates even though the referendum was overwhelmingly supported by the Irish population. Supporters of the referendum maintained that the twenty-seventh constitutional amendment would serve to protect Irish citizenship from abuse. However, upon analyzation, there are deeper issues which surface during this debate on citizenship. Questions about racism, Irish identity and a misinformed populace all arise. I hope to capture these various deliberations and use them to inform my opinion of multi-culturalism in Ireland.

Methodology

I began my research by reading several books in order to establish a foundation on which to do my research. The books that I found most helpful were *After the Celtic Tiger:Challeges Ahead* by Clinch, P., Convery, F., Walsh, B, *Citizenship in A Global Age: Society, Culture, Politics* by Gerald Delanty, *Prejudice in Ireland Revisited* by Michael Mac Griel. After gaining a good understanding of the background to the citizenship referendum, I conducted my interviews. I decided that instead of doing formal interviews, I would engage in informal conversations with the people I was meeting. This worked very well for me. The issues surrounding the citizenship referendum are very sensitive and highly contentious; I generally found that my interviewees

found me less threatening and were more candid with me when I was not writing in my notebook and asking them formal questions. My interviewees were:

Paul Bradford- He is a senator and a member of the Fine Gael party. He represents a rural constituency in Cork. He asserted that his constituency did not ask for a referendum, however most of them voted for it.

Enda Kenny- He is the leader of the Fine Gael Party. We mainly spoke about the context surrounding the citizenship referendum and why the government's actions were highly suspicious, and regarded as political game-playing. We also talked about why the Fine Gael party would supported a "yes" vote.

Brian Hayes- He is a senator and a member of the Fianna Fail party, which is the party that is currently in power in the government. Our conversation did not last very long, however he managed to convey to me why he thought the referendum was essential.

Sarah Benson- She is the communications officer for the Child's Rights Alliance. Our conversation was centered around how the referendum would take protection away from children of non-national parents born in the country. We also focused on the misinformation that the government used to prove its case for the referendum.

Marrian Tannum-We talked about her impressions of the citizenship referendum. In addition, she provided me with a plethora of articles about race and immigration which proved to be extremely helpful in my paper.

Mercy-Mercy is the director of the Association for Refugees and Asylum-seekers in Ireland. We mainly talked about the goals of her organization and some of her experiences as an African in Ireland.

Margaret Barady- She is the secretary of a Fine Gael senator. She has very strong negative

views on the referendum itself and the context in which it was implemented. She also gave me some insight into the racial tension that exists within her constituency.

My paper is arranged in a specific order so that the reader can gain a broad understanding of the background and discussions surrounding the citizenship referendum. My paper begins with an explanation of Ireland's emigrant background and its rapid transition to a state of prosperity and immigration. It is important to understand these facets of Irish society because they serve as the foundation for discussions regarding citizenship and multi-culturalism in Ireland. History has a lot to do with Irish conceptions of diversity. The second section is a detailed description of citizenship theories and how citizenship, immigration and multi-culturalism are related. This is an extremely important part of the paper. The more that I research the context and debate surrounding the referendum, the more that I realize that informed debate about citizenship and the citizenship referendum is impossible without a solid understanding of citizenship theory and the academic debate on what it means. The third section is an introduction to Irish citizenship and what it embodied before the referendum was passed. The fourth section is an explanation of the citizenship referendum itself and the purpose that it is meant to fulfill. The fifth and sixth sections are the arguments for and against the referendum. The last section outlines my personal perception of multi-culturalism in Ireland. This section is influenced by my personal background, the issues that I have encountered during research and any personal observations and conversations that I have had along the way.

Background and Context-Economic Prosperity and Immigration in Ireland

Ireland's Emigrant Background

For every generation since 1845, unemployment and emigration abroad have been the realities of life for the people of Ireland; these are the unwanted consequences of both historical and recent troubles. In the nineteenth century, Ireland survived mass starvation and in the twentieth century endured a war of independence and a civil war which resulted in bitter divisions between people throughout the country. In addition, the island experienced a depression in the 1930's, "a traumatic and largely self-induced economic and social hemorrhage in the 1950's"¹ and another severe recession in the 1980's. During the recession of the 1980's, the unemployment rate reached a peak of 17% and the Irish people emigrated at rates that have been unprecedented since the Great Famine of the 1840's. Clinch, Convery and Walsh describe Ireland's standard of living prior to the 1990's as "only two-thirds of the European Union's (EU) average."²

The effects of the 'Celtic Tiger'

However the 1990's presented the island with an economic boom which was exceptional, not just by historical Irish standards, but by international standards. Between 1993 and 2001 the annual growth rate of the Irish economy has been more than double the average recorded over the past three decades—8% compared with 3.5%. This great economic run has lasted for nearly a decade: there has been unprecedented economic growth accompanied by higher incomes, more

¹Clinch, P., Convery, F., Walsh, B. *After the Celtic Tiger: Challenges Ahead*. (The O'Brien Press: Dublin, 2002)

²Ibid

jobs, more people and “more variety.”³ Comparing statistics, which represent the economy and the standard of living, between the 1980's and 2000, highlights this drastic change. Find average income, life expectancy, etc. The unemployment rate fell from 15.7% in 1993 to under 4% at the end of 2000. In fact, the numbers of people at work have risen by 45% over the 12 years (1990-2002), representing an annual average increase of 3% a year. This percentage increase in employment in Ireland is 2.7 times that of the next best-performing country, the Netherlands.⁴ In addition, Ireland is no longer a country of emigration. As the economic boom gathered pace, young people were absorbed into employment in Ireland instead of looking abroad for their livelihood, as had been the norm for the majority as recently as the 1980's. This economic success has permeated many facets of Irish life: socially, technologically, culturally and psychologically.

The “new” Ireland of the late 1990's, a software hothouse, of *Riverdance*, e-commerce and property speculators, with its cosmopolitan cities and an increasingly self-confident, agnostic, entrepreneurial and worldly youth, has left into a future unimagined, and certainly unanticipated, in the doldrums of a decade ago.⁵

Reflecting on this new phenomena Clinch, Convey and Walsh, who are Irish nationals assert that “the national self-image has changed...the melancholia reflected in the emigrant songs, like Andy Irvines ‘It’s a long long way from Clare to here’, are like echoes from a distant age...Ireland has gone from a country to get out of to a country to get into.” This quote is making reference to Ireland’s influx of immigration in the last decade or so. Between 1995 and 2000, approximately 250,000 people immigrated to Ireland: half were returning Irish and a majority of

³Ibid

⁴Ibid

⁵Ibid

the remainder were American or European. Immigration into Ireland is significant. (look at Central statistics office-Population and migrant estimates), However in this discussion of immigration, within the context of the Citizenship Referendum, it is important not to exaggerate the magnitude of migration and the increase in population within Ireland. If Ireland had been a U.S. state, its population growth rate in the 1990's would have ranked 23rd out of the 50 states. In addition, almost 50 of the 280 metropolitan areas in the U.S. grew faster than Greater Dublin in the 1990's. Though there is large-scale immigration into Ireland, these comparisons between the U.S. and Ireland make phrases coined by Irish newspapers, which refer to a “flood of immigrants”, seem somewhat dramatic and perhaps, unwarranted. It is important to note that there is massive difference between the United States and Ireland in terms of population, economic size and space; Ireland is more comparable a U.S. state. Additionally, the U.S. is historically a state of inward migration; as described above Ireland has been a state of outward migration until recently.

Immigration

Undoubtedly, immigration has many benefits. First, immigration stimulates the supply of labor. As more jobs are created, fewer people within society are available to fill them. In the period up to 2001, Ireland's substantial economic growth and consequent low unemployment rates resulted in labor and skills shortages across many sectors of the Irish market. As new technologies create a demand for skilled labor and an aging population and more affluent lifestyles require servicing by unskilled or low-skilled workers. The inflow of immigrants is essential in order to fill jobs and shape the economic and social future of Ireland. Clinch, Convery and Walsh highlight the roles that “nurses recruited from the Phillipines, [and] farm

workers recruited from the Baltic countries [played in] averting collapse in key sectors.”⁶

In addition, employers are beginning to recognize diversity as being an asset. Heterogeneity in the skilled workplace ensures that creative, unique and diverse ways of solving problems and looking at situations are utilized; as innovation and talent becomes increasingly important in the technological age, diversity is essential. Ireland’s diversity is becoming more multi-racial and multi-ethnic. Though returning Irish emigrants still accounted for 46% of all immigration in 2002, there has been a significant decrease in the number of European and US immigrants. Paralleled with this decrease in European and US nationals, there has been an increase in the share of migrants coming to Ireland from the rest of the world; immigration from the rest of the world accounted for 35% of total immigration in 2002, compared with 11% in 1996.⁷ An increase in international students has added to this diversity. These diverse populations are clearly visible in today’s Irish society. Along with their expertise and contribution to Ireland’s work force, they also bring their cultures, values and outlooks on life from their experiences in their native countries. In addition, Ireland has had an inflow of refugees and asylum-seekers. The continuous violation of civil, political, cultural, social, economic and human rights in countries throughout the world, including Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Romania, and Moldova, have resulted in these countries’ natives migrating to stable countries in order to survive. Since 1995, asylum-seekers have constituted 10% of foreign Immigrants. In 1995, when the significant numbers of Migrants were returning Irish emigrants, and EU and US nationals, there were 424 applications for asylum. However, this number has increased significantly over a ten-year period, with the number of applications

⁶Ibid

peaking at 11,364 in 2002.⁸

As Ireland has become an economically vibrant country, it has also become a destination place for asylum seekers and refugees, skilled and unskilled immigrant workers and international students. Clinch, Convery and Walsh articulate Ireland's abrupt transition from a state of emigration to a state of immigration, and the potential and already apparent problems that this change has on Irish social and cultural society.

For this generation, the tide is reversed. Having imposed ourselves on the rest of the world for centuries, we now find ourselves in the unaccustomed role of host, with low unemployment and high in-migration. It is clear that there is considerable cultural ambivalence; the reality and potential for racial antagonisms lurks."⁹

A majority of Ireland's existence has been as a fairly homogenous racial, religious and cultural society. With the exception of the massive impact of British colonialism, historically Ireland has not been exposed to outside cultural influences. It has existed as a primarily white and extraordinarily Catholic state whose people have strong cultural identities and traditions. Initially, this diversity was seen as a welcome result of the island's success. However, as the island becomes more multi-cultural and heterogeneity is becoming a permanent fact, one of the Irish reactions is to be increasingly wary of this diversity; the presence of other cultures, presented by immigrants, can be seen as a threat to Ireland. The potential reasons for these attitudes vary and will be discussed in a different section of this paper. However, it is important to understand the Irish context that the citizenship debate is taking place in. The decision by the

⁷Ward, T. *Immigration and Residency in Ireland, City of Dublin VEC, (2002)*

⁸Ibid

⁹Clinch, P., Convery, F., Walsh, B. *After the Celtic Tiger: Challenges Ahead.* (The O'Brien Press: Dublin, 2002)

Irish government to review and revise citizenship policy, specifically by presenting the Citizenship referendum, coincides with this period of significant socio-economic and demographic changes.

Models of Integration and Citizenship

Acquiring Citizenship-Jus Soli and Jus Sanguinis

The acquisition of citizenship is largely just an accident of birth.¹⁰ The two citizenship principles through which children can acquire citizenship, *jus soli and jus sanguinis*, are both based on birthright; the former grants citizenship based on place of birth, the later grants citizenship of the basis of identity of the parents (or descent). *Jus Soli* is seen as “a key aspect of the assimilative capacity of common law countries of immigration.”¹¹ Anyone who is born within the realm of a country which utilizes the *jus soli* principle is entitled to citizenship. Thus children, whose parents are of a different nationality than the country in which they reside, are still entitled to citizenship within the country of their parents’ residency. For instance, this has allowed people who have migrated to the US to have children with US citizenship. Conversely, the *jus sanguinis* principle is based on parentage and family links. Immigrants’ children are not entitled to citizenship of their parents country of residence, until they undergo processes of naturalization. Only the descendants of nationals are able to acquire citizenship. However, this process has created some problems. For example, “growing populations of European-born children of migrant workers were excluded from national citizenship, thereby exacerbating

¹⁰Costello, Cathryn. “Accidents of Place and Parentage: Birthright Citizenship and Border Crossings” published in *The Citizenship Referendum: Implications for the Constitution and Human Rights*. (School of Law, Trinity College: Dublin, 2004)

problems of social and cultural exclusion.”¹² In order to remedy this many countries, such as Germany, have amended their laws in order to facilitate naturalization of long-term residents. The distinction between *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* is central to understanding the referendum, which will change Ireland’s mode of citizenship from both principles to solely the latter principle.

Marshall’s Theory of Citizenship

In order to understand the debate surrounding the Citizenship Referendum in Ireland, it is useful to be acquainted with some of the academic discussions regarding theories of citizenship and integration. The citizenship theory presented by T.H. Marshall is a good starting point for analyzing citizenship. Marshallian theory, in the general sense, is the foundation for modern conceptions of citizenship. It is based on the idea that membership of society must rest on the principle of formal equality; this formal equality is expressed through the state’s responsibility to endow rights and confer duties to every citizen. In his own words, “Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed.”¹³

Marshall claims that the rights embodied in citizenship have evolved from the acquisition of civic rights to political rights to social rights. The discussion of civic rights emerged in the seventeenth century, highlighting freedom of the individual with respect to freedom of conscience, freedom of worship, freedom of speech and the rights form to enter contract and

¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid

¹³Delanty, Gerard. *Citizenship in A Global Age: Society, Culture, Politics*. (Open University Press: Buckingham and Philadelphia, 2000)

ownership of private property. These rights gained a legal status and could be upheld by recourse to the courts of justice. Thus, this civic conception of justice meant that citizenship is inextricably linked to the pursuit of equality; under the law, all citizens are equal.¹⁴ In nineteenth-century Britain, the principle of political rights emerged. Political rights refer to the ability of the individual to secure their political enactment in the acting governmental institutions. These political rights are an extension of the civil rights, which were emphasized in the seventeenth century, from adult males to the full adult population. The foundations for social citizenship were laid in the nineteenth century; however, the link between social rights and citizenship did not crystallize until the twentieth century.¹⁵ His argument is that social citizenship, which eventually assumed the form of the modern welfare state (housing, health, education, unemployment benefits and pensions), is a means of minimizing *de facto* inequality that results from a capitalist economic society. Social citizenship has an equalizing effect in that it brings about equality of social opportunity. He believed that “Equalization is not so much between classes as between individuals within a population which is now treated for this purpose as though they were one class. Equality of status is more important than equality of income.”¹⁶

The Marshallian theory of citizenship is the base for western discussions of citizenship, however there are limits to the applicability of his ideas. His conviction that the ideal of citizen equality can be realized through the welfare-state has been disproved; the welfare-state has not alleviated inequality to the extent that he thought it would. In addition, the recent effects of globalization cannot be addressed within the context of Marshallian theory. According to

¹⁴Ibid

¹⁵Ibid

Christian Joppke, the theory is limited because “the movement of people across states revealed the citizenship is not only a set of rights, but also a mechanism of closure that sharply demarcates the boundaries of states.”¹⁷ In order to analyze citizenship as it currently exists, it is essential to recognize that people are moving across global boundaries in an unprecedented way; this movement is raising issues pertaining to integration, multi-culturalism, nationalism, and communitarianism within countries. In order to be applicable, current citizenship theories must take this change into account.

Current Discussions on Citizenship-

There are several theories which address the current nature of citizenship. For simplicity’s sake, I will only refer to one theorist, Gerald Delanty. He gives a comprehensive view of the debates on citizenship and acknowledges that huge impact that immigration has had on these debates.

Gerald Delanty-

Delanty argues that the classical tradition of modern liberal thought (Marshallian theory) was based on a principle of equality whereas today one of the most important themes in the debate on citizenship is the recognition of different, whether they are cultural, religious, etc. He presents several categories for analyzing citizenship. The liberal tradition focuses on rights, while the conservative tradition stresses the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. In the republican and communitarian traditions, participation is emphasized; while in nationalist-inclined (mainly communitarian) conceptions, identity is important. More recently, theories

¹⁶Ibid

¹⁷Joppke, Christian. “How Immigration is Changing Citizenship: A Comparative View.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol 22 no 4. (Taylor & Francis. Online, 1999)

have arisen which negate the assumption that citizenship is based on a connection with the state (government) or the nation (society). Rather, citizenship is based on democracy and a new idea of global citizenship.¹⁸

After outlining Marshall's liberal theory of citizenship, Delanty explains the communitarian theories of citizenship. His analysis begins with a discussion of liberal communitarianism. This theory emphasizes the importance of participation in defining citizenship. Liberal communitarianism criticizes liberalism for being too formalistic; instead of just emphasizing individuals' rights, as liberalism does, it takes into account the substantive dimensions of identity and participation, the real ties that bind members of a community together. The coupling of identity and participation forms a political community. This advocacy of collectivism over individualism brings up questions about group culture and its relationship with citizenship membership. The political community in which citizenship exists is based on a prior cultural community. Minorities and incoming groups must adapt to this cultural community in order to participate in the political community. However, liberal communitarianism does have strong similarities to liberalism in that it recognizes that equality is an integral part of citizenship. This equality is defined as a recognition of different cultures within the political community. He claims that:

With respect to the politics of recognition—that is recognized on the public as opposed to the interpersonal level—this can take the form of an emphasis on equality, for instance the equal dignity of all citizens with respect to their rights and moral worth, or an emphasis on difference, the need of the majority culture to make concessions to particular groups, generally minorities but also, for communitarians, more importantly, for the state to give

¹⁸Clinch, P., Convery, F., Walsh, B. *After the Celtic Tiger: Challenges Ahead*. (The O'Brien Press: Dublin, 2002)

official recognition to cultural community, be that for the majority or the minority.¹⁹ As long as the state recognizes diversity and protects minority groups by making a formal commitment to tolerance, it can also protect the majority culture by ensuring that cultural minorities participate within the framework of the established political community. Thus, liberal communitarianism has addressed the existence of a cultural community and multi-culturalism within the political participatory community.

Conservative communitarianism, the next theory that Delanty details, stresses collective identity. Citizens share a collective identity within a nation, thus this identity usually takes the form of national identity. Delanty states that “the communitarian stance, at least in its more conservative form, tends to stress family, religion, tradition, nation and what might generally be called a culture of consensus.”²⁰ This ‘cultural of consensus’ makes up a community which is designed to create a sense of identity, responsibility and participation based on the consensus of the population, which is mainly expressed in strong moral terms. Such a citizenship model suggests that new members of the community and minorities must assimilate into this ‘cultural of consensus’ so as to reach a similar sense of identity, responsibility and participation. Identity is allied with the notion of the nation and participation is access to ‘social goods’; therefore, conservative communitarianism stresses the need for new members of the community to identify themselves with the nation and, assuming this identity, participate within the community in order to enjoy the ‘social goods’.

Civic republicanism is a communitarianism form of participation. However, identity and cultural play a relatively small role in this theory, compared to that of liberal and conservative

¹⁹ Ibid

communitarianism; diversity is only part of the private sphere. Instead, Delanty reasons that the commitment is to achieving a common goal within the community. The solidarity of the community is maintained through civic bonds; it is recognized in the ideal of a self-governing political community. In order to be self-governing, civic republicanism defines citizenship as “participation in the public domain of civil society.”²¹ The essence of this concept of citizenship is that it requires the consent of the governed. This model is compatible with a representative government that can only be maintained by the commitment and participation of the community; a representative can only be maintained by a community’s willingness to be active by doing things such as voting, running for office and actively pursue information among other things.

The next theories of citizenship that Delanty highlights are relatively recent developments and both negate the connection between citizenship and the nation-state. Democratic citizenship refers to the idea that citizenship is the direct route to democratic transformation. Delanty explains that “in radical democracy the aim is to bring about social change by means of transforming politics.”²² This type of citizenship is based on a strong emphasis of collective action and participatory democracy at a grassroots level. Democratic citizenship requires a three-pronged analysis: that of the voice, of difference, and of justice. The recognition of voice requires citizens to articulate problems and their solutions. Difference takes into account the uniqueness of all people who enjoy citizenship, whether it is cultural, religious, etc. Justice is defined not just as formalistic opportunity of equality (as presented by Marshall) rather, it is a more substantive goal. It is strongly participatory mode of acquiring rights; justice,

²⁰Ibid

²¹Ibid

coupled with a voice and recognition of difference empowers different groups within a community. The basis of democratic citizenship has shifted from community consensus, which is central to communitarianism, to community dissensus. Delanty states that:

The more groups that are involved in decision-making and the more heterogenous that that citizenship becomes, the more dissent will creep into civil society. It can no longer be taken for granted that citizenship can appeal to an underlying consensus such as a common conception of the good, as in liberalism, or community, as in communitarian theories.²³

The last major citizenship theory that Delanty presents is cosmopolitan citizenship.

There are several different dimensions to this theory; however, they are all based on the premise that the constitutional state is no longer a national state, having been transformed by globalization and the growing significance of international law. It can be concluded that the fundamental criterion of citizenship is not birth, as is the case for most kinds of national citizenship, but residence and a growing multilayered view of identity. Increasingly, identity is no longer the collective experiences of the people who make up a nation; rather, “identities are overlapping, negotiable and contested.”²⁴ This is due to increased globalization, the increasing plurality of countries, and the emergence of a global civil society. Delanty argues that national forms of citizenship are rest on the assumption that mobility is limited. However, today’s global mobility is far-reaching and resulting a greater connection between nations and their people.

we must avoid the equation of citizenship with sameness. In citizenship, it may be possible to reconcile the claims for pluralism, the need for solidarity and the contingent vagaries of historical change. If citizenship can develop in a context with difference, differentiation and pluralism are tolerated, then citizenship need not assume a repressive

²²Ibid

²³Ibid

²⁴Ibid

character as a political instrument of the state.²⁵

In addition to the increasing plurality of countries, there is a growing significance of international law, specifically in the form of human rights law. Human rights are based on the belief that all individuals enjoy ethical and legal rights by virtue of their common humanity. Human rights and citizen rights have largely remained separate; the former is based on the individual as a member of humanity, the latter is based on the individual as a member of a political community.

However, Delanty argues that “There is much empirical and theoretical evidence to suggest that the present situation is one of a blurring of human rights and the rights of citizenship. It is not no longer possible to separate these into two separate domains.”²⁶ As globalization and cross-border migration become more prevalent, this theory will become more relevant.

Irish Citizenship

Irish Citizenship pre-Belfast Agreement

When the Irish Constitution was enacted in 1937, it conferred citizenship on one category of people—those who have been citizens of the state prior to the jurisdiction of the Constitution. Additionally, Article 9 of the Constitution stated that citizenship was to be determined by law. The Irish Nationality and Citizenship of 1956 allocated entitlement to Irish citizenship from a number of sources. It embodied the *jus soli* principle, which provided that ‘Every person born in the island of Ireland is entitled to be an Irish citizen’.²⁷ In addition, citizenship can be acquired

²⁵Ibid

²⁶Ibid

²⁷Doyle, Oran. “Citizenship and Equality” published in *The Citizenship Referendum: Implications for the Constitution and Human Rights*. (School of Law, Trinity College: Dublin, 2004)

through descent; this reflects the *jus sanguinis* principle. Under this principle, a person is entitled to Irish citizenship at birth if they have a parent who is, or would have been if alive at the date of their birth, an Irish citizen, regardless of where the person is born. If a child born outside Ireland seeks to claim citizenship, and the child's Irish citizen parent(s) was her or himself born outside the Island and thus become a citizen by descent, the child may only acquire citizenship (by descent) if her/his birth is registered in the Foreign Births Register. Lastly, it possible to become a citizen by naturalization, if certain conditions are satisfied. Under this provision, the Minister is able to confer citizenship on an individual given that the applicant is of full age; is of good character; has resided continuously in the State for at least one year prior to applying for citizenship; has resided in the State for a total of four years out of eight preceding application; plans, in good faith, to reside in the State after naturalization; and has made a declaration of fidelity to that state.²⁸

Irish Citizenship and the Belfast Agreement

The Belfast Agreement (1998), signed by the Irish government, the British government and political parties in Northern Ireland, serves as a means of resolution for the civil conflict in Northern Ireland. It was passed by referenda in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Within the provisions of the agreement, the Republic of Ireland was obliged to change Article 2 of its Constitution, which made legal claim to the entire island of Ireland, including the 6 counties of Northern Ireland; this claim was viewed as a stumbling block to the signing of the Belfast Agreement by Northern Unionists (who proclaim fidelity to the UK). However, if the article had been removed, it would have deprived Northern Nationalists of their entitlement to Irish citizenship. Accordingly, Article 2 was amended in 1998. Article 2 now reads in part:

²⁸*Citizenship Referendum: The Government's Proposals* (April 2004) available at <www.justice.ie>

It is the entitlement and birthrights of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation.

This is interpreted as meaning that anyone born on the island of Ireland (North and South) is entitled to Irish citizenship. This amendment effectively made the entitlement of citizenship by means of birth on the island a constitutional right. Thus, the Oireachtas (legislatures) no longer had the power to change the right to citizenship, afforded to a person born on the island, through legislation.²⁹

The Citizenship Referendum

Changes to the Irish Constitution

The amendment to the Constitution is intended to amend Article 9, by adding a new section (presented here in bold lettering) to it. It will read:

- 1 1E On the coming into operation of this Constitution any person who was a citizen of Saorstat Eireann immediately before the coming into operation of this Constitution shall become and be an Irish citizen.
2E The future acquisition and loss of Irish nationality and citizenship shall be determined in accordance with law.
3E No person shall be excluded from Irish nationality and citizenship by reason of the sex of such person.
- 2 **1E Notwithstanding any other provision of this Constitution, a person born in the Island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, who does not have, at the time of his or her birth, least one parent who is an Irish citizen or entitled to be an Irish citizen is not entitled to Irish citizenship or nationality, unless otherwise provided for by law.**
2E **This section shall not apply to persons born before the date of the enactment of this section.**
- 3 Fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State are fundamental political duties of all

²⁹Ibid

citizens.³⁰

Purpose of the Citizenship Referendum

The Twenty-seventh Amendment to Article 9 of the Irish Constitution is intended to qualify the meaning of Article 2; in other words, Article 2 will be interpreted in light of Article 9. This means that the acquisition of citizenship by a child born in Ireland, neither of whose parents are an Irish citizen at the time of birth, will no longer be determined by the Constitution. Thus, a child no longer has a constitutional right to citizenship through the *jus soli* principle; a child has a right to citizenship solely through the *jus sanguinis* principle.³¹ As such, a child may only have a legislative entitlement to citizenship, depending on what the legislation on the matter is. This is a partial return to the pre-Belfast Agreement situation, where the Oireachtas had the power to legislate on the future acquisition of Irish nationality and citizenship. However, it is important to understand that before the Belfast Agreement, the constitution did not explicitly limit the citizenship of Irish-born children with non-national parents rather, it just gave the Oireachtas the power to legislate on the specific matter.

The proposed implementing legislation

After the Referendum was passed, the Government introduced a bill to the Oireachtas which would amend the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act of 1956. If the bill is passed, it will establish how Irish-born children with non-national parents can qualify for citizenship. The bill outlines several criteria for these children to gain citizenship.³² However, the most relevant facet of this bill is that it no longer gives Irish-born children with foreign-born parents the

³⁰Ibid

³¹Ibid

automatic right to citizenship. The government reasons for this change vary, however the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Michael McDowell, stresses the need for Irish citizens to have a ‘connection’ with the nation. In his own words he says “[citizenship] is more than just an entitlement to a passport. Citizens must show loyalty to the state and fidelity to the nation...there should be a greater connection with the country before an entitlement of citizenship and all that it entails.”³³ This implies that Ireland will begin to follow a conservative communitarian approach to citizenship, where fidelity, connection and responsibility to the state are key aspects of being a citizen.

Debates surrounding the Citizenship Referendum

The issues surrounding the Citizenship Referendum have been contentious since its proposal in the Dail on the 13th April 2004. However, it is generally agreed that the Referendum’s primary proponents, the Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats led Coalition Government, have steadfastly pursued its implementation. Two months after they presented the proposed amendment to the Constitution, it was included in the local and European elections to be voted on by the people of Ireland. On the 11th June 2004 the referendum passed with a ratio of 4:1. Despite this overwhelming “yes” vote, there was, and still is, fervent opposition towards the amendment; dissenters have expressed concern over the context in which the amendment was voted in, the government’s motivation for the referendum and the social consequences of these constitutional changes.

Brian Hayes, a Fianna Fail senator, assured me that the change to the constitution was

³² *Citizenship Referendum: The Government’s Proposals* (April 2004) available at <www.justice.ie>

“absolutely necessary”³⁴ for a number of reasons which will be expressed below. However, the opposition claims that the opposite is true. In an angry and accusatory tone, Vincent Browne of the Irish Times asserts that “[the referendum] is a cynical, opportunist exploitation of ignorant prejudice against asylum-seekers in the context of local and European elections and, as such, is racist in its effect...”³⁵ This quote is referring to the context surrounding the referendum. As mentioned earlier, Ireland is undergoing demographic changes due to its newfound prosperity. As such, the island is becoming more ethnically and racially heterogeneous. [america] With the increase in immigrants and asylum-seekers, Irish people are being faced with new challenges regarding diversity such as inclusion of minority groups, racism and ethnicism, misunderstanding between nationals and immigrants, and perhaps, being confronted with new definitions of Irishness. The makeup of people who claim Irish citizenship has direct implications for who is considered Irish and why they are considered Irish. Thus, the Citizenship Referendum brings up many issues regarding diversity, making it a good medium for discussing multi-culturalism in Ireland.

Supporting Arguments for the Referendum-The Government’s Reasoning

The government has formally enumerated a number of reasons in favor of changing the way in which citizenship is acquired in Ireland. Additionally, individuals have made statements intended to support the argument for the constitutional amendment. After considering these arguments, I have concluded that they fit into two categories. The first category has to do with

³³McDowell, Michael. “Putting a value on citizenship is not racist” *The Irish Independent*, 9th April 2004.

³⁴Hayes, Brian. Fianna Fail Senator. Personal Interview. 15 November 2004.

³⁵Browne, Vincent. *The Irish Times*, 28th April 2004.

the integrity of the Irish Constitution. The arguments in this category refer to the abuse that Irish citizenship has undergone because of ‘loophole’ presented by the constitutional changes made by the Belfast Agreement. The second category of arguments has to do with the burden that the rise in non- national births has had on the country’s maternity hospitals.

The ‘Closing the Loophole’ Argument

According to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Michael McDowell, the automatic entitlement to citizenship given to the babies of non-national parents born in Ireland has exposed Irish citizenship to abuse. In the Dail debates, he begins his argument by stating:

Citizenship is the means whereby we become members of a moral, cultural, political, social, economic and legal community based on rights and duties established in law. Citizenship, then, is not just an entitlement to a passport with a particular symbol on its cover...it is a complex of rights and obligations shared by people of a common nationality...any abuse of citizenship, by which it is conferred on persons with no tangible link to the nation or the State, flies in the face of Article 9.2 and devalues the concept of citizenship. That is the reason the Government is putting forward this proposal—to eliminate an aspect of our law that exposes Irish citizenship to abuse.³⁶

This statement conveys the importance of Irish citizenship as a source of rights, obligations and identity. Senator Brian Hayes conveyed similar concerns to me during our interview. He expressed concern that allowing children of non-national parents to have automatic citizenship would lead to “an unwanted situation of abuse.” Both proponents of the amendment referred to the Chen case as an example of this abuse.³⁷

³⁶*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

³⁷The Chen Case—This case was brought before the European Court of Justice; it sought to establish that a citizen of one EU Member State has a right to reside in another Member State under EC law, and furthermore that if the citizen is a child, his/her parent had a derivative right to residence along with the child. This is provided that the child and members of the child’s family “are covered by sickness insurance in respect of all risks in the host Member State and have sufficient resources to avoid becoming a burden on the social assistance system of the host Member State during their period of residence.” It arose when a Chinese national gave birth to a child in Belfast. The child was automatically conferred Irish citizenship, therefore also acquiring EU citizenship; the child’s mother,

The outcome of this case has resulted in the view that a person with no tangible connection to Ireland can be given citizenship and, effectively, be considered Irish. The only remedy for this abuse is to abandon the *jus soli* principle and to restrict the distribution of citizenship to people with an Irish heritage, or to children whose parents have fulfilled the requirements which the government believes are necessary to establish ‘connection’ with Ireland. To support this, the government argues that a newborn child is incapable of establishing a connection with Ireland, so this connection must be mediated through the parent; therefore, the parent’s heritage and connection to Ireland are considered when assessing the child’s rights to citizenship. The exact meaning of what McDowell refers to as a “tangible” connection to Ireland is up to interpretation. Indeed, I have personally noticed how important cultural connection is within Irish society. People in Irish communities seem to share bonds based on heritage: there is distinctly Irish music, dancing, sporting events, language, social interaction and history. This will be discussed in greater detail in a different section, however it is important to acknowledge that there is a correlation being drawn between Irish citizenship and Irish identity (connection), especially among ordinary people in society.

The government argues that the outcome of the Chen Case does not just affect Irish citizenship, it also has implications for EU citizenship. Minister McDowell asserts that “as an Irish citizen, the person is also an EU citizen with all the rights of free movement and other treaty rights that go with that status. In addition, as an Irish citizen, the person can avail of the common travel area arrangements that exist between Ireland and its near neighbor, the UK.”³⁸

Mrs. Chen, wanted to reside in England to assert her child’s right to EU residence and her derivative right residence. (Opinion of Advocate General Tizzano, delivered on 18 May 2004, Case C-200/02, Man Lavette Chen and Kunqian Catherine Zhu v Secretary of State for the Home Department.

³⁸*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

This was the issue that Brian Hayes spent most of the interview talking about. He stressed that Ireland is unique because of its combination of *jus soli* and the right of its citizens to have a wide range of free movement within other states of the EU. He seemed to be especially concerned about Ireland's relationship with England, stating that "Ireland's citizenship laws are out of kilter with UK laws. The relationship that allows the common travel arrangements between Ireland and the UK is very important for many reasons, among those being for trade and commerce between our countries."³⁹ The outcome of the Chen case means that a non-EU citizen whose child has acquired Irish citizenship through being born on the island, can move freely between and, in fact, take residence in other EU states. This has the potential to cause a strain between Ireland and other EU states, who will find themselves with an inflow of non-EU citizenship trying to assert the right to EU residency through their child's Irish citizenship. Though this issue has not arisen in the EU, McDowell asserts that he is "aware, anecdotally...of women from eastern Europe and elsewhere in the world—who have who have come [to Ireland] on holiday visas, given birth, collected the birth certificate and the passport for the child and returned home."⁴⁰ He refers to this phenomenon as "citizenship tourism"⁴¹ which all of the politicians that I spoke with believed to be an "unintended effect of the Good Friday Agreement."

During my interviews with Hayes and Enda Kenny, I asked about the effects that this referendum could have on the Belfast Agreement and whether these unintended effects had been considered during the negotiations. Kenny was opposed to the context in which the referendum

³⁹ Hayes, Brian. Fianna Fail Senator. Personal Interview. 15 November 2004.

⁴⁰ *Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

⁴¹ *Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

was carried out; however, he supported a ‘yes’ vote on the basis that “the Good Friday Agreement has created a ‘loophole’ that makes Irish citizenship subject to abuse and, therefore, must be closed.”⁴² He endorsed the referendum as the only means of closing this hole. The aim of the changes that the Belfast Agreement made to Irish Constitution was to replace the territorial claim to Northern Ireland that was implicit in articles 2 and 3. As mentioned earlier, it was imperative to recognize the concerns of sectors of Northern Ireland who had legitimate claims to Irish citizenship. However, in an attempt to address these complexities by giving everyone born on island an entitlement to citizenship, Hayes asserts that “an undesired anomaly as arisen whereby anyone can acquire EU residency by having a child born in Ireland who is entitled to Irish citizenship.”⁴³ In addition, the Oireachtas are unable to correct this problem through legislation. He saw this as an undesired, yet foreseen effect of the agreement. When I asked why the problem was not addressed during the negotiations, he maintained that the issues surrounding the Belfast Agreement were incredibly sensitive and that it was not appropriate to introduce these complications into the talks; the achievement of reaching an agreement was more important than clarifying the specifics of Irish citizenship. In addition, the effects of heavy immigration in recent years have made the issue more pertinent now than it was in 1998.⁴⁴ In response to my inquiries about whether the Belfast Agreement would be undermined by the referendum, Hayes and Kenny both stressed that the British government had been consulted about the referendum, and had agreed that the ‘loophole’ was an unintended effect of the agreement. The constitutional changes that are being made will not undermine the agreement

⁴²Kenny, Enda. Leader of the Fine Gael Party. Personal Interview. 15 November 2004.

⁴³Hayes, Brian. Fianna Fail Senator. Personal Interview. 15 November 2004.

because nationalists in Northern Ireland will still be entitled to Irish citizenship.

Burden on Dublin's Maternity Hospitals

The second category of arguments that are in favor of the referendum relates to the difficulties that Dublin's maternity hospitals are experiencing. When the referendum was first introduced, Minister McDowell insisted that the Masters of the Maternity Hospitals pleaded with him to address the problems they were experiencing due to the constraints that pregnant non-national women were putting on the health system. Incidentally, the masters later denied this consultation with the Minister. However, McDowell pursued the argument that the maternity hospitals are under strain. He believes that these problems are directly connected to the abuse that Irish citizenship is facing because of the loophole.

The evidence that we have a serious problem in terms of the integrity of our citizenship law is to be found in the fact that huge and unprecedented pressures have emerged in our maternity hospitals. They are not two separate issues from which I can move, one to the other. They are two sides of the same coin.⁴⁵

Statistics that the government has gathered show that from March 2002 to December 2003 of the female asylum-seekers aged 16 and over, almost 60% are pregnant at the time of application. Despite a recent drop in the number of asylum seekers, the proportion of women who are pregnant remains at 57%.⁴⁶

In addition to this high percentage of pregnant asylum seekers, the minister has stressed that "a disproportionate number of non-national mothers are giving birth to children in Dublin maternity hospitals and that a disproportionate number of non-national mothers are presenting to

⁴⁴Hayes, Brian. Fianna Fail Senator. Personal Interview. 15 November 2004.

⁴⁵*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

⁴⁶*Citizenship Referendum: The Government's Proposals* (April 2004) available at <www.justice.ie>

maternity hospitals at a late stage of pregnancy.”⁴⁷ According to government statistics, the total figure for births to non-nationals in three Dublin hospitals is 4824, which accounts for between 20-25% of all births in these hospitals. According to the government, these high birth rates to non-nationals are placing strains on the medical system. There are not enough beds, medical supplies or nurses to deal with the high proportions of women giving birth. In addition, there is a significant pattern of very late arrival to the State in order to give birth. This presents more issues for the maternity hospitals. In addition to having strains put on their resources, hospitals are concerned about issues that arise from serving a non-Irish population. First, problems arise when mothers make their first visit to the hospital in the late stages of their pregnancy. Often, late-arrivers have not received adequate pre-natal care or, in the case of foreign nationals, have been subject to different types of care depending on what country they originate from. In the case of non-nationals, language barriers have proven to be an issue and this is especially burdensome when a patient’s medical history is unknown.⁴⁸

These are the main arguments used to support the referendum. During my research, I have noted that these arguments are generally void of any reference to race or ethnicity. I believe, from statements made in my interviews and in the Dail debates, that this is largely because the government did not want to raise issues about Ireland’s new racial heterogeneity for fear that it would bring up any racist or xenophobic elements in the debate. The opposition refers a lot more to Ireland’s new racial make-up and the issues that this transition has presented in Irish society.

⁴⁷*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

Dissenting Arguments Surrounding the Amendment

The Citizenship Referendum has been opposed by a diverse group of politicians, civil liberties groups and individuals. In addition, there are non-governmental organizations (NGO's) who are not formally opposed to the referendum, however have outlined potential problems with various aspects of the referendum; they have also motioned the government to be watchful of the contentious context in which the vote is taking place. As mentioned above, many of these arguments are mindful of the various social and political complexities that this referendum has brought up; many of these arguments take into regard the implications that the referendum and the air in which it was presented will have on human rights, Irish Constitution and the racial climate in Ireland. Given the wide array of dissenting arguments, I have sectioned them into four categories: the timing and process of the referendum, constitutional concerns, misinformation used to support the referendum, and human rights concerns.

The Timing and Process of the Referendum's Implementation

The first dissenting argument is in regards to the timing of the referendum and the process in which it was passed. The arguments presented in this section reflect the views of a substantial number of the opposition; however some of the political party opponents, specifically Fine Gael, used these arguments as the sole basis of their dissent. Edna Kenny, leader of the Fine Gael Party, told me that the timing of the referendum was highly suspicious. As mentioned earlier, the Irish public voted for the amendment on the same ballot on which the local and European elections were held. Kenny accused the government of playing political games with a sensitive issue. He asserted "it is impossible not to interpret the Government's solo run on this issue as anything but a political stroke to shore up votes for Fianna Fail and the Progressive

⁴⁸ *Citizenship Referendum: The Government's Proposals* (April 2004) available at <www.justice.ie>

Democrats in the local and European elections.”⁴⁹ The accusation that Fianna Fail tried to use the subjects of citizenship and immigration to garner votes for themselves is understandable upon reading some of the literature that was circulated during the campaign by a Fianna Fail candidate.

Concern continues to be expressed about the number of asylum seekers and refugees entering this country as a result of our economic prosperity and this issue presents a challenge for all of us...Asylum applications must be processed in compliance with international obligations. I believe that Fianna Fail has a comprehensive understanding of the issues and that it is taking measures both legislative and administrative to deal with this matter efficiently...I reject the ‘open door’ policy which is advocated by the parties to the left and accept that all states need effective laws to deal with entry, residence and departure of non-nationals in the interests of the well being of society. I warmly welcome the Minister for Justice’s recent announcement of the Government’s intention to hold a referendum on the right to citizenship for all persons born on the Island of Ireland and the right of residence for their parents.⁵⁰

This excerpt clearly advocates Fianna Fail as the only party willing to “do something” about immigration. In addition, those who oppose the referendum are labeled as having an ‘open-door’ policy to immigration; this effectively labels the opposition as being in favor of “opening the flood gates of immigration.” Perhaps more problematic is how immigration is clearly linked to the residency of non-national parents. The referendum does not have anything to do with the rights of residence of parents. Bruce Morrison, a former US Congressman who secured 48,000 work permits for people living illegally in the US in the 1980's, said that the referendum will “invite [people] to exercise their worse instincts about newcomers rather than their best.”⁵¹ It is important to note that these newcomers are a diverse group of people who are of different races,

⁴⁹*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

⁵⁰Fergus Finlay, “FF’s lowest tactic yet: spreading fear and confusion on immigration” *The Irish Examiner*, April 2004.

⁵¹Hennessy, Mark. “Morrison terms poll on citizenship ‘dangerous’” *The Irish Times*, 14th April 2004

ethnicities, religions and cultures. By misinterpreting the intentions of the referendum by referring to the residency rights of non-national parents, the leaflet is indicating this issue is what people should base their vote on; it would not be surprising if there was confusion as to what issues the referendum addresses. During our meeting, Kenny expressed concern that the context in which the referendum was being voted on would allow for a racist campaign.

In addition to the timing of the referendum, there was widespread opposition to the limited amount of time that was allowed for debate and the process in which it was passed. Though advocates of the amendment claim that “this issue has been allowed to fester for far too long”, the specific issue pertaining to the amendment was presented before the Dail on 13th April 2004 to be voted on 11th June 2004. According to dissenters, this did not allow enough time for an informed debate. The people of Ireland were not clear on what issues to consider when voting, and did not have anything to consider except for what the Minister of Justice told them. In addition, the matter was not conferred to Oireachtas All-Party Committee, which is a group that consists of all the political parties with the purpose of debating contentious issues to reach a consensus and provide recommendations to the government. In addition, no human rights groups, or political parties in the north or south were consulted by the government prior to the announcement that a referendum would be held. GFA Naturally, all of the opposition rebuked this lack of consultation.

There has not been a Green Paper on citizenship, not consultation with the Opposition parties, the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution or the human rights commissions, North or South. There have not been, and there are no plans for, public hearings on the factual issues said to give rise to the need for this referendum campaign. We should hear from the national immigration bureau of the Garda Siochana, the maternity hospitals, the health and social welfare services, and also from NGOs and advocacy groups. We could then arrive at an informed view. What this is what public hearings should be about, they will not happen. There will simply not be enough time for a fully-informed debate on the proposal with only eight weeks until election day, time

which was intended to be devoted to local and European issues.⁵²

These arguments highlight the dissenting views that emphasize the need for an informed debate about citizenship and all the issues that it brings up, including increased immigration. This was not seen as viable within the context of the local and European elections and was further disabled by the rapid manner in which the referendum was proposed and implemented.

Misinformation and Contradictions

The arguments in this category assert that the government is not representing the issues surrounding the referendum properly. In this section, all of the government's arguments are refuted and some accuse the government of making contradictions. Opponents find it problematic that the information being used to support the referendum is being wrongly interpreted, presented out of context or is outright fabrication. These concerns are held by opposing political parties, NGOs and civil liberties groups. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) asserts that

those involved in public service provision, including health, need to ensure that minority ethnic groups are not blamed for being the main or only resource problems in the delivery of public services, and that vulnerable groups are not used in inappropriate ways to seek further resources. The NCCRI calls for guidelines on the way that statistics are collected and used by public services, in particular to ensure that such statistics are used *in context*.⁵³

It must be noted that the NCCRI did not advocate a “yes” or “no” vote to the referendum, however did recognize the importance of distributing accurate information on which to base the decision on.

The campaign for the referendum began with Minister McDowell claiming that Masters

⁵²*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

⁵³NCCRI (ed) *Advocacy Paper on the Citizenship Referendum: Issues, Observations and Concerns.*

of the maternity hospitals approached him about the number of non-nationals giving birth in the hospitals and the toll it was taking on the hospitals' resource. Though there is a strain on hospital resources, the Masters disavowed the minister's assertion that they had called for a referendum.⁵⁴ In addition, the statistics that the minister used to support his proposal allegedly were not placed within the right context. Opponents have criticized the minister for beginning his campaign irresponsibly. Mr. J Higgins of Sinn Fein argued that "the referendum to restrict the citizenship rights of children born in this State is irredeemably compromised and discredited from the beginning...Deputy McDowell began his campaign by claiming a crisis in the maternity hospitals, in other words beginning the campaign with the worst kind of scaremongering and the figures he gave are equally unrevealing..."⁵⁵ The figures which Mr. Higgins is referring to were used by Minister McDowell to provide evidence that the maternity hospitals were overburdened by non-national women and heavily pregnant foreigners. My interview with Sarah Benson of the Children's Rights Alliance revealed that the statistics representing the births of non-national women were more complicated than the government has asserted.

The Children's Rights Alliance conducted research to ascertain the impact that non-nation women and non-EU national women who arrive unannounced or at a late stage of pregnancy have on Dublin's maternity hospitals. The following conclusions are derived from this research.

(NCCRI: Dublin, 2004)

⁵⁴Costello, Joe. "Citizenship Vote: Master, opposition and FF backbenchers united on citizenship" Justice.ie, 22 April 2004.

⁵⁵*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

§ Statistics on non-national women giving birth in Dublin's hospitals.⁵⁶

Minister McDowell stated that 25% of births in three hospitals in Dublin are to foreign nationals which represents “a disproportionate number of non-national mothers [who] are giving birth to children in Dublin maternity hospitals.” However, he did not take into Ireland's net inward migration and changing demographics into account. The findings of the 2002 census show that there were 273,520 people who were residents in the state and were not classified as Irish nationals. In addition, the number of work permits issued by the government increased by 760% in the five-year period from 1999-2003; the work permits issued to non-EEA nationals has increased from 6250 permits in 1999 to 47,551 in 2003. This substantial increase in issued work permits and net inward migration, which contrasts with high net outward migration rates in the 1980's, explains why so many non-national women are giving birth in Dublin's hospitals. Further statistics show that during the Census in 2002, there were 69, 856 women of childbearing age (15-44) who lived in Ireland. The proportion of non-Irish national women in the age range 15-44 is greater than the Irish women in this age range. Irish females aged 15-44 constitutes approximately 45% of all Irish females, while African females of the same age group in Ireland constitute 74.2% and Asian females constitute 83%.

The study also notes that hospitals do not record the nationality of the father. This is relevant because if the father is an Irish citizen, then the child of the non-national mother will automatically be given Irish citizenship. Therefore, this would not be a reason for mothers to arrange to have their children in Ireland. Additionally, hospitals do not ask about a non-national mother's residency status. This is important because these non-national women could have been in Ireland with work permits, may have gained refugee status or may be married to an Irish

⁵⁶King, Dervla. *Immigration and Citizenship in Ireland* for the Children's Rights Alliance, (CRA, 2004)

national. The number of non-national women giving birth in Dublin hospitals is irrelevant when trying to assess the number of women who are coming to Ireland solely to have Irish citizenship bestowed on their child.

§ Non-EU women who arrive unannounced or at a late stage in pregnancy⁵⁷

Minister McDowell is “aware, anecdotally...of women from eastern Europe and elsewhere in the world—who have who have come [to Ireland] on holiday visas, given birth, collected the birth certificate and the passport for the child and returned home.”⁵⁸ First, it is problematic to campaign for a constitutional referendum on the basis of ‘anecdotal’ evidence. Anecdotal evidence is subjective and only represents the view of one party. Further, it has been statistically confirmed that the number of non-national women who arrive late at a late stage in pregnancy is very low; no more than 548 births at the three Dublin maternity hospitals fall into the category. This represents just under 2.4% of births in the hospitals. Sarah Benson pointed out that his number can be reduced significantly; it is not possible to assume that all of these women arrived in the Ireland with the sole intent of giving birth. In 2003, 174 Irish women arrived late or unannounced at two of the maternity hospitals. Thus, there must be alternate reasons as to why some non-national women arrive at the hospital late besides wanting to gain Irish citizenship for their children. As mentioned above, hospitals do not inquire about residency status or the nationality of the father. These are the factors that should be considered when trying to approximate the number of women coming to Ireland solely for the purpose of giving birth; it is impossible to draw any definitive conclusions because there are no sufficient statistics.

⁵⁷King, Dervla. *Immigration and Citizenship in Ireland* for the Children’s Rights Alliance, (CRA, 2004)

⁵⁸*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

§ Pregnant Asylum-Seekers⁵⁹

As stated in the arguments supporting the referendum, the government has gathered statistics that show that from March 2002 to December 2003 almost 60% of the female asylum-seekers aged 16 and over are pregnant at the time of application. However, although the proportion of pregnant women who applied for asylum remained the same, the numbers of women involved dropped significantly within a period of a year. In December 2002, 312 pregnant women applied for asylum while in December 2003, 79 pregnant women applied for asylum. This constitutes a drop of 74% in a year. The government argued that the referendum was urgent because the decision in L and O was not deterring pregnant women from coming into the state to seek asylum for the purpose of conferring Irish citizenship on their child. However, this significant drop in the number of pregnant suggests that the situation was not as severe and thus, not more urgent than it was in 2002.

§ The Maternity Hospitals' Crisis⁶⁰

Minister McDowell states that “the evidence that we have a serious problem in terms of the integrity of our citizenship law is to be found in the fact that huge and unprecedented pressures have emerged in our maternity hospitals.”⁶¹ His statement implies that these “huge and unprecedented pressures” are a direct result of the number of the women who come to Ireland solely to give birth and have their children acquire Irish citizenship. However, there are many other factors which have contributed to this problem. Statistics demonstrate that the annual number of births in Ireland is now lower than in previous decades. In 1971 the total number of

⁵⁹King, Dervla. *Immigration and Citizenship in Ireland* for the Children's Rights Alliance, (CRA, 2004)

⁶⁰King, Dervla. *Immigration and Citizenship in Ireland* for the Children's Rights Alliance, (CRA, 2004)

live births in Ireland was 67, 551 and in 1981 the number of births was 72, 158. This figure is significantly lower for 1991 at 52, 718. During this period there was a decrease in the total number of beds available in the hospitals. Though the number of births in 2001 rose to 57, 882 the number of beds in Dublin maternity hospitals was lower than it was in 1991. There were 752 beds in 185, 624 beds in 1995 and 587 beds in 2003. This illustrates a constant decrease in beds while there has been a recent increase in the birthrate. In addition, there have been staffing shortages in the hospitals. The Master of Coombe maternity hospital asserted that delivery levels are up 4% this year and 12% since he took the job five years ago; however, the allocation given by the Easter Regional Health Authority is inadequate and does “not reflect activity needs.” No extra staff has been provided for these deliveries although extra are required. In an interview on RTE Radio1, Dr. Daly stated that there would probably not be a significant reduction in pressure if all births to non-nationals who come to Ireland with the specific intent of gaining Irish citizenship were taken out of the picture. He also believed that if the hospital got additional beds and staff, it could easily cope with the demand from non-nationals.

These arguments reflect the inadequacy of the government’s statistical information relating to non-national women giving birth. As noted during my interview with Sarah Bensen, there seems to be tension between the government’s policy to encourage immigration for economic prosperity and the claims that non-nationals are exerting pressures on maternity hospitals.⁶² Dervla King presents the example of the 235 births at Dublin’s maternity hospitals to Filipino women. According to her, “it is widely acknowledged that many of these women will

⁶¹*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

⁶²Benson, Sarah. Communications Director for the Children’s Rights Alliance. Personal Interview. 24 November 2004.

have been working in the Irish health services and that their skills will continue to be required in the future.”⁶³ There are just not enough evidence to assert that the pressure on maternity hospitals is a result of non-national women coming to Ireland solely to gain citizenship for their child.

Another assertion by supporters of the referendum is that Ireland must change its constitution in order to get into line with other EU countries. In Irish Times, Minister McDowell is quoted as saying “this is not an issue about maternity hospitals. Ireland could not be the only EU state offering national—and therefore EU-wide—citizenship rights to babies whose parents came here solely for this purpose.”⁶⁴ However, Cathryn Costello, of the Law Department at Trinity College in Dublin, argues that “the fact that different Member States have different approaches to citizenship is to be expected. The EU is a union of diverse states, which seeks to achieve harmonization only in discrete areas.”⁶⁵ It may only act when it is clearly required in order to achieve a specific goal of the EU. Member States were admitted upon mutual consent and according to each country’s domestic constitutional requirements. The Maastricht Treaty, which established the status of Citizenship of the European Union, clearly secured the right of EU citizens to move securely and freely through the Member States. However, it did not set out to define how the Member States should confer citizenship. The issue has arisen before the European Court of Justice in the *Micheletti* case. It concerned a man of dual Italian and

⁶³King, Dervla. *Immigration and Citizenship in Ireland* for the Children’s Rights Alliance, (CRA, 2004).

⁶⁴Finlay, Fergus, “FF’s lowest tactic yet: spreading fear and confusion on immigration” *The Irish Examiner*, April 2004.

⁶⁵Costello, Cathryn. “Accidents of Place and Parentage: Birthright Citizenship and Border Crossings” published in *The Citizenship Referendum: Implications for the Constitution and Human Rights*. (School of Law, Trinity College: Dublin, 2004)

Argentinean citizenship who wanted to assert his benefits as an EU citizen in Spain. Under Spanish law, he was regarded as Argentinean and therefore was not entitled to the EU's free movement guarantees. The Court of Justice rejected the Spanish argument on the basis that:

Under international law, it is for each Member State, having due regard to community law, to lay down the conditions for the acquisition and loss of nationality. However, it is not permissible for the legislation of a Member State to restrict effects of the grant of nationality of another Member State by imposing an additional condition for recognition of that nationality with the view to exercise of the fundamental freedoms provided in the Treaty.⁶⁶

This means that Member States may not question one another's methods of conferring national citizenship.⁶⁷ As such, none of the Member States have approached Ireland about its citizenship laws. The Chen Case has also been used as by supporters of the referendum to outline the consequences of keeping the *jus soli* principle alive in Irish citizenship law. However, it should be noted that it was a preliminary ruling. The European Court of Justice confirms preliminary hearings 80% of the time, however that leaves a significant chance that the Court will overturn or amend the decision. In addition, a child with EU citizenship has a right of residence in one EU Member State (in which the child was not born) on the basis that the child's family is "covered by sickness insurance in respect of all risks in the host Member State and have sufficient resources to avoid becoming a burden on the social assistance system of the host Member State during their period of residence."⁶⁸ The Chen Case lays specific instances in which a family of an EU-born child can reside in an EU Member State that is not the place of the

⁶⁶Case C-369/90 Maria Vicente Micheletti [1992] ECR I-4230.

⁶⁷Costello, Cathryn. "Accidents of Place and Parentage: Birthright Citizenship and Border Crossings" published in *The Citizenship Referendum: Implications for the Constitution and Human Rights*. (School of Law, Trinity College: Dublin, 2004)

⁶⁸NCCRI (ed) *Advocacy Paper on the Citizenship Referendum: Issues, Observations and Concerns*.

child's birth. Therefore, it may not be used to justified all cases of residency based on a child's EU citizenship.

The last argument in this section reflects the contradictions that the government has based their debate in support of the referendum on. Minister McDowell states that “any abuse of citizenship, by which it is conferred on persons with no tangible link to the nation or the State, flies in the face of Article 9.2 and devalues the concept of citizenship.”⁶⁹ The integrity of Irish citizenship is at stake. However, there are the referendum will fail to address other issues that threaten the integrity of Irish citizenship. In the 1980's and 1990's there was a “passports-for-sale” campaign during which wealthy foreigners could contribute one million Euro to an ailing business in return for an Irish passport. Deputy Costello of the Socialist captures some of the issues surrounding this campaign. As a result of this campaign there are examples of wealthy foreign nationals who are fugitives from justice, yet are able to use their Irish passports to travel the world. Additionally, not all of their passports have been revoked.⁷⁰ The Minister McDowell asserts that he “categorically ended granting of citizenship to investors under the ““passports for sale”” scheme.⁷¹ Ironically, however, there has been no legislation adopted to formally stop this abuse.

The last major contradiction that the ‘integrity’ argument brings up is in regards to the ‘grandfather’ clause. According to Deputy Hanafin, citizenship “is inextricably linked to belonging to a community, to have a commitment to the society and of being loyal to a

(NCCRI: Dublin, 2004)

⁶⁹McDowell, Michael. “Putting a value on citizenship is not racist” *The Irish Independent*, 9th April 2004.

⁷⁰*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

country.”⁷² However, this restricting citizenship to the *jus sanguinis* principle will not ensure that all people entitled to Irish citizenship will fulfill these criteria; in some cases the application of *jus sanguinis* will allow people with no real connection to Ireland become Irish citizens. This is possible under the grandfather clause. According to the Department of Justice:

If you are of the third or subsequent generation born abroad to an Irish citizen (in other words, one of your parents is an Irish citizen but none of your parents or grandparents were born in Ireland), you may be entitled to become an Irish citizen by having your birth registered in the Foreign Births Register; this depends on whether the parent through whom you derive Irish citizenship had himself or herself become an Irish citizen by being registered in the Foreign Births Register *before you were born*. If you are entitled to register, your Irish citizenship is effective from the date of registration. The Irish citizenship of successive generations may be maintained in this way for each generation ensuring registration in the Foreign Births Register before birth of the next generation.⁷³

The ‘Grandfather’ clause allows for a person who has never been to Ireland and, potentially, does not intend to come to Ireland to acquire citizenship.

Constitutional and Human Rights Issues

The citizenship referendum has raised issues relating to the Irish constitution, children’s rights and human rights. Dissenters have argued that the change to the Irish constitution will have complex consequences, such as causing ambiguity within the constitution and creating unstable situations for Irish citizen children, both within Ireland.

According to Cathryn Costello, “while the law may not impose restrictions on what changes are permissible by way of referendum, it is always important to ask what the impact of

⁷¹Ibid

⁷²Ibid

⁷³King, Dervla. *Immigration and Citizenship in Ireland* for the Children’s Rights Alliance, (CRA, 2004).

the changes will be on our constitutional system.”⁷⁴ The articulated purpose of the referendum is to ensure that people do not abuse Irish citizenship by coming to the State solely to give birth. However, the change to the constitution is much broader in its effects and unduly removes citizenship from children born in other circumstances. There are less than 548 clear cases of women giving birth in Ireland solely to confer Irish citizenship on their child; however, the constitutional change will affect all the Irish-born children with immigrant parents. In addition to removing constitutional protection from children with non-Irish parents, the new Bill focuses on the ‘connection’ that one has to Ireland. Though the Bill is defining a child’s entitlement to citizenship, the Bill focuses on the ‘connection’ of the parents instead of the ‘connection’ of the child. There is no provision within the bill which acknowledges the citizenship of children who grow up in the country and therefore developing a ‘connection’. As such, a child who grows up in Ireland and knows nothing besides Ireland, may not be able to gain citizenship because their non-national parents do not fulfill the naturalization requirements, are illegally present in the state, or are not present in the state at all.⁷⁵

Children who have non-national parents will not automatically gain citizenship and, therefore, do not receive the same protections and an Irish citizen child would. William Binchy notes that, within the Irish Constitution, certain fundamental rights are only guaranteed for Irish citizens. He writes:

the present position regarding the constitutional protection of non-citizens is far from

⁷⁴Costello, Cathryn. “Accidents of Place and Parentage: Birthright Citizenship and Border Crossings” published in *The Citizenship Referendum: Implications for the Constitution and Human Rights*. (School of Law, Trinity College: Dublin, 2004)

⁷⁵The Lobe & Osayande clarified that non-national parents of Irish citizen children are not guaranteed ‘leave to remain’ in Ireland based on their child’s citizenship. The government has used this case to stop processing over 11,000 applications for ‘leave to remain’ based on a child’s Irish citizenship, and is retrospectively issuing deportation notices to the applicants.

certain. The proposed change in the Constitution would make matter worse; so far as its effects can be identified, the would be damaging to the interest of children who are completely innocent. The direction which the change would lead us towards is directly opposite from that proposed by the Constitutional Review Group and the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, both of which recommended that the Constitution be amended to remove the present limitation in a number of the fundamental rights provisions of the Constitution to citizens and its replacement by a guarantee that would include non-citizens within the express protection of these provisions.⁷⁶

The uncertainty of constitutional rights that are afforded to non-citizens is problematic. The effect of the referendum would be to destabilize the protection afforded by the Constitution to the rights of children born in Ireland to foreign parents who have not been naturalized. It is impossible to foresee how extensive a subtraction from the present constitutional protection will result. It will be the court's discretion to outline the rights of children of non-national parents. This uncertainty makes the referendum dangerous.

In addition to constitutional uncertainty, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) and the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) point out that if the referendum is passed, it will effectively create two classes of children in Irish society. Children will be entitled to certain rights solely on the basis of their parents' lineage. Thus, children will be divided into "those who are nationals because they are born in Ireland and therefore part of the Irish nation, and those who are nationals and citizens because of who their parents are."⁷⁷ Additionally, Sarah Benson asserted that the referendum is not consistent with the Articles and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning non-discrimination, best interests of the child and voice of the child. Article 2 of the CRC requires States Parties to "respect and ensure the rights set forth

⁷⁶Binchy, William. "Citizenship and the International Remit of Constitutional Protection" published in *The Citizenship Referendum: Implications for the Constitution and Human Rights*. (School of Law, Trinity College: Dublin, 2004)

⁷⁷Children's Rights Alliance (Ed) *The Case against the Citizenship Referendum from the Standpoint of the*

in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parents...race, ...national, ethnic or social origin..”⁷⁸

In reality, the passage of the referendum will disproportionately impact children of ethnic and racial minorities, children from states experiencing conflict and children in lower-income households. Additionally the Convention holds that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in any actions or decisions which may affect children. It seems as though no consideration has been given to the Convention, because the referendum has the effect of restricting the rights of certain children instead of strengthening their rights; it is difficult to argue that a restriction of a child's rights is in their best interest.

My Perceptions of Multi-Culturalism in Ireland

In this section, I will articulate my perception of multi-culturalism in Ireland. Many factors have contributed to this perception including my research on the citizenship referendum, personal experiences and observations, and correspondence. It is important to note that as an African-American woman in Ireland, my perceptions are greatly influenced by the fact that I am a racial minority. Thus, it is helpful to analyze my personal experiences because they provide a first-hand account of a minority experience in Ireland.

My views on the racial minority experience in Ireland

It is impossible to reach any finite conclusions about the minority experience in Ireland. Obviously, every person's experience as a minority is colored by a multitude of background factors, among those nationality, previous experiences, expectations and personality. These

Rights and Well-Being of Children, (CRA: Dublin, 2004)

⁷⁸Ibid

diverse assessments of the minority experience are reflected in the comparison between my personal perceptions and other first-hand accounts of racial and ethnically distinct minorities in Ireland. The very fact that my experiences in Ireland differ significantly from the experiences of other people of African descent highlights that multi-culturalism in Ireland is multifaceted and complicated.

My experience

Until I began this study, I did not give any significant thought to my racial distinctness within Ireland. Though I was mildly aware that I am different from the majority, I attributed my uniqueness to that fact that I am American, not that I am black. I measured my difference from people in Ireland with my accent, my personal style and my mannerisms which, in general, are all by-products of my American up-bringing. As such, I did not expect my race to have any impact on my experience in Ireland. For the most part, my expectations were confirmed. I encountered the same difficulties that any American would face in Ireland and have been treated well by Irish people in all circumstances.

However, there are elements of my experience which were colored by the fact that I am African-American. If anything, my presence has been met with goodwill and curiosity, as if seeing an African-American woman is a rarity. I recall, on many occasions, having comments directed towards me that referred to my distinct facial features; my looks are different from a majority of the people in Ireland, therefore making them seem unique and exotic. During my rural homestay, my host mother asked me if people with dark skin use the same type of make-up as she does; she didn't realize that dark skin is, in many regards, the same as light skin. Additionally, young Irish people seem to hold the U.S.'s hip-hop and r&b culture, which is represented predominantly by African-Americans, in high regard; thus, I felt that I was often

paralleled with the people that are highly visible in the industry. All of these examples reflect the curiosity which I generated; this indicates that meeting an African-American is a rare experience for many Irish people. All in all, my experience within Ireland has been thoroughly enjoyable and my race has not become an issue.

Experiences of resident racial minorities in Ireland

The positive experiences outlined in the section above do not mirror many of the experiences of racial minorities who live in Ireland. This is true for refugees, asylum seekers, international students, economic migrants and high skill workers; many of the racial and ethnic minorities in these groups have experienced prejudice on the basis of their race. Additionally, it is not limited to people who are visible racial minorities. Blatant and abhorrent intolerance is illuminated in this testimonial of African couple who arrived in Dublin to seek asylum:

We arrived in Ireland in December 2001. By 12pm we were at Dublin immigration. A man attended to us...Upon presenting our passports, he said "Oh God, more jungle bunnies". I could have been a tourist, or a businessman bringing in business. What kind of image was he portraying of the good people of Ireland? I said: "I beg your pardon?" and was rudely asked: "what do you want?" I identified myself as a member of a political party. I said I was here to ask the Irish to protect the lives of my precious wife and I. The answer he gave was "Don't give me that crap". We were handed two white cards to fill and our documents were confiscated. He returned after a while to tell us that we were being deported back to our 'f***ing country'. We were ordered to get our bags and to follow him. We were trying our best to keep up. Outside we were told not to come back to Ireland but to crawl back into the holes we'd crept out of. The whole time we were pleading for mercy and trying to explain our situation. Two other men had joined us. One spoke about how "these animals are ruining us." We were pushed into a red van, where my wife began to cry and ask them just to listen. These men scarred me and shattered my wife's spirit...How many times must one be referred as an animal before they feel violated? How many dirty words must be sprayed at your wife before she feels dirty? My wife at the time was more petrified of these men than being forced back to our tyrant government. The reality is that no words could fully describe how we felt or should I say, how we were made to feel. I grew up around Irish people. They educated me, returned my faith in religion and buried my loved ones. I came prepared for

hostility, but not animosity.⁷⁹

This passage shows the terrible racism that people are capable of harboring, contrary to my initial beliefs about Ireland. The couple who were victims of this fervent abuse were made to feel unwelcome in Ireland from the moment they stepped off of the plane. Additionally, it illuminates the effects that this type of hostile behavior has on the people it is directed towards. The narrator's wife was more frightened in the presence of these immigration officers than she was at the thought of being sent to her tyrant-ruled country. This story is exceptional, however the hostility it illustrates is not outlandish. I have heard many stories about the racism that people experience every day. An interview at the Association for Refugees and Asylum-seekers in Ireland revealed that the organization's Sierra Leonian director, Mercy, has had a number of racially motivated attacks on her home in South Dublin.⁸⁰ I have read countless articles and heard stories about ethnically distinct nationals and non-nationals receiving verbal abuse as they walk down the street or wait in line at the supermarket on a weekly basis.⁸¹ I have witnessed the way people of African descent are treated. As I was waiting at a supermarket on the north side, I watched as a black couple's shopping bags were searched because the check-out attendant "thought [she] saw them put two boxes of crackers into the bags when they only paid for one." The attendant did not even speak directly to the couple, rather she gave orders to the employee who was helping the couple with their bags. She referred to the man and woman as "she" and "he" instead of addressing them respectively. I was shocked by the attendant's blatant hostility

⁷⁹Personal Testimonial, "No world could describe who we were made to feel", *The Irish Examiner*, 7 August 2003

⁸⁰Mercy. Director of the Association of Refugees and Asylum-seekers in Ireland. Personal Interview.

⁸¹For more information refer to: NCCRI (Ed) *Reported Incident Relating to Racism: May to October 2004*

and wondered if this was an experience that many people have every time they shop. Naturally, nothing was found in the couple's bag.

The difference between my experience in Ireland and the experience's of the people described above is striking. It is difficult to understand why I have not encountered this hostility and, in fact, have been treated well even though I am a visible racial minority. Our distinct experiences highlight that the issues surrounding these incidences are complex and not as straightforward as color. As mentioned above, my American background might influence the way that people view me. Irish society identifies strongly with America. American television shows, brand names and musicians are embraced in Ireland. Everyday, there are newspaper articles about the U.S. As stated earlier, young people equate me with the African-American hip-hop culture, which they view favorably. Irish people's exposure to the U.S. probably makes me unthreatening, if not intriguing. This contrasts with the way that society views people of other countries. The Irish have no overt connection with countries such as Nigeria, the Phillipines or Algeria and are probably ignorant of the situations in these countries. As will be explained below, there is a prevalent view that African and Eastern Europeans are coming to economically exploit Ireland. As a result, people act with hostility towards these groups. As an American, people do not view me in the same way. Despite my positive experience in Ireland, my outlook towards multi-cultural environment has changed significantly. I am sensitized to slight indications that racial tension exists. For instance, I have noticed that women of African descent seem to be self-conscious; they often look at the ground as they walk down the street, as if they are expecting to be verbally abused.

It is this context of racial tension that the Citizenship Referendum was held in. It is

apparent that the issues surrounding the citizenship and multi-culturalism are connected. It is important to note that citizenship is an important aspect of membership to a nation. The government is restricting the citizenship rights of immigrant children, a growing number of whom are the offspring of non-Irish, non-white and non-western European parents, and thus restricting their membership to the society. Given this reality, the referendum does have implications for multi-culturalism in Ireland. Whether or not the government intended, it is clear that portions of the Irish public voted “yes” to the referendum on the grounds that they felt threatened, by the immigration. An RTE exit poll of over 3000 voters taken immediately after voting indicated that 36% of these voters who voted “yes” to the referendum because they believed the county was being “exploited by immigrants.” Another 27% voted “yes” because there are “too many immigrants” in the country.⁸² This shows that 63% of those who voted “yes” had an overt problem with the immigrants in the country. Additionally, people have used the results of the referendum to further harass people. In the NCCRI’s document “Reported Incidents Relating to Racism: May to October 2004” there are several examples of this hostility.

“A couple of nights after the referendum a Zimbabwean woman was walking along the street when a group of males shouted at her and asked her if she was starting to pack her bags for home”

“A Nigerian woman on her way to the Community welfare office was subjected to verbal abuse by a man in a car who shouted abuse such as “go back to your own country you stupid Black.”

“A Nigerian woman was verbally abused by a man in the same queue as her in the rural post office where he shouted at her to go home and stop milking the system, we don’t want you Nigerians or your babies here. The woman reported the incident to the local Garda.”⁸³

⁸²Browne, Vincent. *The Irish Times*, 28th April 2004.

⁸³NCCRI (Ed) *Reported Incident Relating to Racism: May to October 2004* (NCCRI: Dublin, 2004)

The people who made these racist remarks seem to believe that the goal of the referendum was to ensure that foreign people, like those they were harassing, were force to leave Ireland. In the last incident it is clear that the perpetrator is ill-informed of the issues surrounding asylum and immigration. Additionally, he clearly indicates that, in his view, Nigerian babies are not welcomed members of the Irish nation.

My Research Regarding the Referendum and its Reflection of Multi-Culturalism in Ireland

The research that I have conducted for this paper has informed my opinion on multi-culturalism in Ireland. I have concluded that many Irish people's perceptions of immigration and multi-culturalism are influenced by a number of factors, many of which are reflected in discussions about the citizenship referendum. When analyzing the number of factors that have influenced these views, it is useful to understand the citizenship and integration theories that the Irish government seems to embrace. The role that the government plays in multi-culturalism and integration helps to explain why Irish people have certain views.

Ireland's citizenship theory

Upon analyzation, it is apparent that the Irish government has adopted the conservative communitarian model of citizenship. As explained in the 'models of citizenship and integration' section, this model is based on a 'cultural of consensus'. This refers to a "community which is designed to create a sense of identity, responsibility and participation based on the consensus of the population, which is mainly expressed in strong moral terms. Such a citizenship model suggests that new members of the community and minorities must assimilate into this 'cultural of consensus' so as to reach a similar sense of identity, responsibility and participation."⁸⁴ This emphasis on community, identity and connectedness is often reiterated by members of the Irish

government. Another model that the Irish government follows is that of civic republicanism. The key feature of civic republicanism is that diversity and integration are not facilitated by the government, rather they are kept in the private sphere. Additionally, the government does not help to facilitate minority identity. It is clear that parents of children must have a fundamental ‘connection’ with the country, implying that the Irish government values minority assimilation over cultural pluralism. Unlike liberal communitariansim, democratic citizenship and cosmopolitan citizenship, the government does not formally recognize cultural diversity.

The Irish model differs from both United States’ and Canadian models of citizenship and integration. The United States operates on a model of liberal neutrality.⁸⁵ States which use this model allot equal rights and opportunities to everyone. Thus programs, such as affirmative action, are justified on recognition that certain groups have unequal opportunities compared to the majority and therefore need assistance in attaining *de facto* equality. However, the state does not publicly maintain cultural diversity. Canada operates on a model of liberal pluralism. These states give minorities special rights in the public sphere in order to facilitate the maintenance of minority culture. It is acknowledged that the majority cultural is dominating, therefore they compensate minority groups in order to ensure cultural diversity.

Given that the Irish government does not help in facilitating minority culture or *de facto* equality in the public sphere, the Irish population’s perceptions on multi-culturalism come from other sources. It is important to remember that the ‘Celtic Tiger’ has changed the demography of Ireland in a very short period of time. The Irish nation has not been confronted with the vast

⁸⁴Quote from “Theories of Citizenship and Integration” section above.

⁸⁵Ingram, Attracta. “Citizenship and Diversity.” *Mosaic or Melting Pot—Living With Diversity*. (Royal Irish Academy: Dublin, 2003)

cultural diversity that it now present on the island. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is wide spread confusion about immigrants and the cultures that they are bring into the country, especially in the absence of government leadership. As the RTE exit poll indicated, many people are fearful of what immigrants are going to do to Ireland. There are a number of factors that have contributed to these attitudes, many of which are evident when researching the background and context of the citizenship referendum.

Ethnocentrism

A very interesting concept to consider is Irish identity and whether this identity reinforces, or justifies ethnocentrism. Ireland has had a complex history which, prior to colonialism, reflected multiple distinct cultural traditions within the country. However, English colonialism has had several effects on the Irish people's conception of Irish identity. In *Prejudice in Ireland Revisited*, Michael Mc Greil recognizes that there are two kinds of ethnocentrism: offensive ethnocentrism and defensive ethnocentrism. Offensive ethnocentrism refers to all acts of ethnic expansionism that are a result of a nation holding "the erroneous belief that 'our way of life' is the best for the other groups even if it is imposed on them."⁸⁶ Defensive ethnocentrism often emerges in response to attempts to impose assimilation on the people. Ethnocentrism in Irish society has been largely a case of defensive ethnocentrism in response to the offensive ethnocentrism that English colonialism presented. The latter almost succeeded in replacing the native language and culture of the majority Irish population up until 1921. In 1921, an Irish campaign against English colonialism succeeded in securing independence. During this campaign, ideas of 'Irishness' emerged and were used to revolt against the English culture. As a

⁸⁶Mac Greil, Michael. *Prejudice in Ireland Revisited*. (Survey and Research Unit at St. Patrick's College: Co. Kildare, 1996)

result, a distinctly Irish, and arguably manufactured, Irish culture emerged. This culture has remained valid to this present day. There is a distinctly Irish way of dancing, playing music and socializing among many things.

A survey that Mc Greil conducted in 1989 reflects a lot about Irish views of Irish culture. Participants were asked “*which of these terms, i.e., Irish, Province/County, Northern Irish, Southern Irish, Anglo-Irish, British, European, or other, best describes the way you usually think of yourself?*” An overwhelming majority of 96% considered themselves to be primarily Irish. This strong ethnic self-identity is coupled with a strong sense of patriotism and concern for preserving the “Irish ethos.” 63.1% of those surveyed agreed with the statement that “Generally speaking Ireland is a better country than most other countries” and 75.4% of those surveyed believed that “We, the Irish, have reason to be proud of our history.” Most relevant to this discussion is that 73.2% of those surveyed thought that “In striving for international cooperation, we must take care that no typically Irish customs are lost.”⁸⁷ This overwhelming support for the preservation of a national culture shows the high regard that people hold their uniquely Irish customs in, and the rejection of too much infiltration from other cultures. Mac Greil states that prevalence of these views “could be interpreted as indicating a quasi-superiority complex, which may be a reaction to being so long kept under the thumb of their colonial master.”⁸⁸ The concern for maintaining Irish culture is articulated by a 16-year old Dublin schoolboy during a survey conducted by researcher Anna Keogh.⁸⁹ He said:

⁸⁷Ibid

⁸⁸Ibid

⁸⁹Keogh, Anna. “Talking about the Other: A View of how Secondary School Pupil Construct Opinions

And that's like a good example of what will happen, like in America like, they don't really have a culture... You're all gonna bring your identity with you, like there's too many of all different races in a county, you run the risk of losing it like.

Keogh asserts that Irish history has influenced the way that Irish view multi-culturalism. She maintains that upon any reference to England, the students she interviewed responded negatively, saying things like "Ok, don't get onto the English thing!" and "England robbed everyone! England robbed everyone!" "Colonialism had taken our resources, our space (and land) and our independence."⁹⁰ Perhaps there is a fear that outsiders will do this again.

Globalism

Despite the emphasis on Irish identity, it is acknowledged that Ireland is a very globalized society and has been greatly influenced by outsiders, namely America and England. Though the effects of English colonialism have been prevalent since the War for Independence, globalization has been more apparent in the last ten years. The emphasis on Irish culture may be reflective of a national consensus on what "Irish" culture is; the population is generally comfortable with traditional definitions of Irishness. However, it has been pointed out that Ireland, especially its youth, identify strongly with popular culture and consumerism that is not distinctly Irish. As such, exposure to American and British media probably has an influence on the Irish mentality. Stereotypes of racial and cultural minorities (in the west) are promoted by American and British television shows, reading material and movies. In her survey, Keogh documents the responses that a few Dublin schoolgirls had when she made the comment that some people view multi-culturalism as dangerous. They responded:

Girl 1: Yeah, it's anything that's not Irish

about Refugees and Asylum-seekers" *Cultivating Pluralism*, MacLauchlan, Malcolm and O'Connell, Michael (Ed)(Oak Tree Press: Dublin, 2000)

⁹⁰Ibid

Girl 2: People think it's all American
Girl 3: Yeah, and gangs
Girl 4: Black⁹¹

Keogh questions where the girls get this idea that multi-culturalism is “all American” and that it means “gangs.” She attributes it to be a result of “American television and cinema, particularly less recent productions, which often depict ethnic groups negatively through street gangs and ghettos.” The stereotypes that have presented by the American media contribute to misunderstanding of racial minorities and multi-culturalism in Ireland.

Government Policy

It has already been acknowledged that the government does not play a role in facilitating integration or pluralism. However, it is apparent that some of its policies may have the effect of further polarizing and stigmatizing ethnic minorities, and specifically asylum-seekers. The government is obviously reluctant to grant refugee status to many asylum-seekers. Ireland accepts 13% of refugee applications, which is a very low acceptance rate in comparison to its European counterparts. The UK accepts 29%, Finland accepts 44% and Denmark accepts 55% of all applications.⁹² This probably has an effect on how the Irish view asylum-seekers and Ireland's ability to accept refugees. Another interesting indicator in Keogh's survey was that students she was interviewing were shocked to find out that the Netherlands, a country much smaller than Ireland with a population of about 14 million people, takes around 20,000-40,000 asylum-seekers a year. They genuinely believed that Ireland did not have the capacity to handle the number of asylum-seekers coming in, however this idea was challenged upon hearing about

⁹¹Ibid

⁹²Faughan, Pauline Dr, and Woods, Manide. Research for the Social Science Research Center, UCD. 2004.

the Netherlands asylum-seeking process.

Government policy also hinders integration by not allowing asylum-seekers to seek employment, rendering them completely dependent. Additionally, this perpetuates the commonly held view that asylum-seekers come to Ireland to, as Deputy Noel O'Flynn so eloquently stated, be “spongers”⁹³ on the Irish economy. If the government allowed asylum-seekers to work, they would not be viewed as lazy by many of the Irish public.

As Brendan Carr, a Labour councillor, asserts “Government policy, including the new deportation measures, [is] creating an undercurrent of racism against asylum-seekers.”⁹⁴ He is referring to the deportation measures that are justified by the ruling in the L&O case. In deportation operations, such as Operation Hyphen, ethnic communities have been raided in order to find people are being forced to deport. Deputy Deasy acknowledges, “Operations such as Operation Hyphen significantly damage relations between ethnic communities and the Garda and authority in general. Of some 140 people initially detained in that operation, only 14 were deported. Many people who are legally resident here found themselves sitting in the back of a squad car.”⁹⁵ These types of policies stigmatize ethnic minorities illegally present in Ireland and fuels popular resentment towards them. As Piaras Mac Einri, director of the Cork-based Irish Center for Migration Studies states

Macho moves such as the one we saw on Tuesday can only serve to stigmatize all immigrants as undesirables. It casts immigration as a security-related issue, when in reality it is a far broader question which challenges us all to address the rapidly changing nature of our society, the role of immigrants in this process and the need to create

⁹³Comments, *Irish Times*, 1 February 2002.

⁹⁴Haughey, Nuala. “Refugee Policy Criticized” *The Irish Times*, 11 May 2000.

⁹⁵Excerpt from meeting of Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defense and Women’s Rights, 11 March 2003.

conditions where they can be welcomed and intergrated.⁹⁶

Politicians

The actions and words of some of Ireland's politicians have undoubtedly fueled the confusion and fear that people have about immigrants, especially asylum seekers. As representatives of the Irish nation, politicians are supposed to provide guidance and set an example. However, it is clear that even some of the country's leaders do not have sophisticated views of cultural, racial and ethnic differences. Their statements and actions serve to reinforce the prejudiced views of an uninformed population.

One of the most deplorable actions of a political body was the distribution of leaflets stating that AIDS is rampant in several of the countries that asylum-seekers come from; these leaflets were distributed by the Immigration Control Platform. The leaflets, 5000 of which were distributed outside Dublin and in rural Co. Cork, advocated mandatory testing of asylum-seekers for infectious diseases. This is a classic example of "scaremongering"; the "not-so-subtle message" in the leaflet was that asylum-seekers are contaminated.⁹⁷ Mac Einri., correctly noted that "it is a disgraceful and quite outrageous attempt to label an entire community of people as untouchables and play upon the irrational fear of 'the other' in a way that is both sinister and designed to foment hatred. Images of immigrants and disease are a classic element in the language of right-wing xenophobes and racists."⁹⁸

Most of the politicians' actions have not been as inflammatory as the one described above. However, there have been a number of remarks made by community leaders that only

⁹⁶Mac Einri, Piaras "Raids will stigmatize all immigrants as undesirables." *The Irish Times* 19 July 2002.

⁹⁷Haughey, Nuala. "Tests on asylum seekers deplored" *The Irish Times* 21 February 2000.

incite and facilitate negative views about certain groups. The comments of Deputy Noel O’Flynn were the center of controversy in 2002. He allegedly called asylum-seekers “spongers, freeloaders, people screwing the system.”⁹⁹ These comments were condemned by civil rights groups, such as Amnesty International who claimed that they were in violation of the Incitement to Racial Hatred Act. According to Cormac O’Leary, a citizen of Cork, “the TD is well aware of the tensions that exist in the city and must know that incidents of violence against foreign nationals have already been reported. Very little is needed to inflame the situation.”¹⁰⁰ Another politician, Councillor Dixie Doyle, said “refugees in this country were breeding like rabbits.”¹⁰¹ Besides the point that these comments are insulting and unsympathetic, “there are no statistics to support the case and Councillor Doyle was blatantly incorrect in making such an accusation.”¹⁰² In addition to these remarks, there are Minister McDowell, who is the Minister of Justice, has been very careless in some of his rhetoric. After backing a plan to return illegal immigrants home on EU-organized charter flights, the Minister said “the plan could help in particular to increase the number of Nigerians forced to leave here.”¹⁰³ He has made similar comments since, asserting during a conference that 787 babies were born in Irish hospitals last year to Nigerian parents. He did not offer any figures on the number of English, American,

⁹⁸Haughey, Nuala. “Tests on asylum seekers deplored” *The Irish Times* 21 February 2000.

⁹⁹ Comments, “Racism in Ireland” *The Irish Times* 14 February 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹Keane, Sean. “Councillor apologizes for refugee rabbit slur” *The Irish Times* 16 April 2002.

¹⁰²Ibid

¹⁰³Hennessy, Mark. “McDowell backs proposal to deport illegal immigrants on special flights.” *The Irish Times* 12 November 2003.

French, German or Australian babies born, only Nigerian babies. He added, “you only have to have eyes in your head to see the scale of the problem.”¹⁰⁴ In these statements, he was effectively singling out the Nigerian population and pointing to the only difference that you can see which is color. Additionally, his campaign for the citizenship referendum, in which he initially blamed the maternity hospital crisis on pregnant non-national women, has resulted in a number of attacks on African women who are pregnant. Salome Mbugua, who is African, relays her experience:

I actually tried to hide my pregnancy—and yet I wanted to be proud of my child...Because of what the media were saying at the time—that African women are getting pregnant to stay—I get attacked.¹⁰⁵

The comments and actions of these politicians only serve to reflect multi-culturalism in a negative light. As stated above, it is essential that the Irish population have leaders in government who serve as role models and embrace these changes in Irish society. Joe McDonagh, chairman of Know Racism, said that there were now over 160 nationalities working and living in the state, “the vast majority of whom are making a very positive contribution to the economy and Irish society...Irresponsible and ill-informed comments by elected representatives on these issues could be damaging and potentially dangerous.”¹⁰⁶

Media

The media has played a large role in influencing Irish society’s views on multi-culturalism. Though many newspapers have reported on racist incidences and have highlighted

¹⁰⁴Hennessy, Mark “Taoiseach trying to win over SDLP on referendum.” *The Irish Times* April 19 2004.

¹⁰⁵Morahan, Jim. “Pregnant women targeted by racists” *The Examiner* 10 October 2002.

¹⁰⁶Healy, Alison. “Politicians urged to send clear message opposing racist views.” *The Irish Times* 14 February 2002.

the need for tolerance, they also serve to perpetuate some of the stereotypes about newcomers to Ireland. A study on social exclusion, supported by Integra National Support Structure, showed that the “overwhelming proportion” of media coverage on asylum-seekers “focuses on income maintenance and accommodation, thus directly or indirectly presenting a view of refugees as people whose primary motivation is to freeload from Ireland’s recent prosperity.”¹⁰⁷ This kind of coverage on asylum-seekers and refugees in the media is not balanced with representation from advocates of a multi-cultural Ireland. The most dominant figure on immigration-related issues is Minister McDowell, who supports strict immigration and asylum policies. He cannot be seen as “carrying the flame for multi-culturalism.”¹⁰⁸ More disturbing is the recent report in an Irish tabloid newspaper “that someone swears they saw an asylum seeker buying a car with a check from social welfare.”¹⁰⁹ To illustrate the point, the tabloid provided a picture of someone else’s BMW. Obviously, this sort of media is irresponsible and only serves to fuel rumors about asylum-seekers.

In order to contribute positively to discussions of multi-culturalism in Ireland, the media should give more coverage to the countries that asylum-seekers come from. A lot of the current racism is a result of ignorance; people do not have any knowledge about asylum seekers’ backgrounds. More focus on these countries would lead to a greater understanding of people’s cultural background and their reasons for being in Ireland.

Rumors, Misinformation and Ignorance

¹⁰⁷O’Sullivan, Roddy. “Asylum-seekers coverage ‘biased’” *The Irish Times* 15 May 2000.

¹⁰⁸O’Mahony, Peter. “Talking about Immigration.” *The Irish Times* 9 February 2004.

¹⁰⁹Morahan, Jim. “Pregnant women targeted by racists” *The Examiner* 10 October 2002.

As is evident the sections above, discussions of multi-culturalism in Ireland have been clouded by rumors and misinformation. During an interview with Margaret Barady, a secretary of a Fine Gael senator, she relayed how a constituent who was inquiring about some government services said “If I painted my face black, I would get anything I wanted.”¹¹⁰ This statement reflects two things. First, he assumes that all black people are asylum-seekers. Deputy Naughten of Fine Gael highlights this when he says “There is a great deal of public confusion. Anyone with a skin pigment different from our own is automatically assumed to be an asylum-seeker...I spend a great deal of time explaining that there is an array of different individuals in this country, not all of whom are asylum-seekers.”¹¹¹ In addition, the constituent who made the statement was obviously influenced by the myths that are circulating about asylum-seekers. One myth is that the country is flooded with asylum-seekers. In reality, they represent a tiny proportion of total inward migration. A total of 48,000 work permits were issued each year compared to 7900 asylum applications. Another rumor is that asylum-seekers get money for “cars, mobile phones and drink”, “are not here to work” and “are entitled to social welfare benefits over and above those received by Irish people.”¹¹² The reality is that asylum-seekers are not allowed to work, and are only allotted a weekly payment of 19 Euro plus 9.60 Euro for each additional child. However, this is not common knowledge to many of Ireland’s population.

A survey by Amnesty International has found that the government has failed to counter many dangerous myths about asylum-seekers. The survey of over 1000 people reported that

¹¹⁰Barady, Margaret. Secretary for Fine Gael Senator. Personal Interview. 15 November 2004.

¹¹¹*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

¹¹²Ibid

there was widespread ignorance of the status and benefits afforded to asylum seekers.¹¹³ It was probably these commonly held views which influenced people's decisions when they voted overwhelmingly for the citizenship referendum. In the weeks leading up to the referendum, the government should have clarified the situation of asylum-seekers and ended the myths that are leading to racial tension. It is evident that government officials knew about these rumors as they were mentioned several times in the Dail debates.

Conclusions

The conclusion that I have reached is that there is a fundamental disconnect between the government's policies to facilitate economic growth and their policies, or lack thereof, regarding multi-culturalism. It goes without saying that Ireland owes, and will continue to owe, much of its prosperity to the contribution of immigrants who have shared their unique skills, time and resources. The Irish government has obviously recognized these contributions because it issued 48,000 work permits last year; contributions were made by people of different ethnicities, diverse backgrounds and a variety of outlooks on life. It is this pluralism that helps to keep the workforce vibrant, innovative and productive.

However, government policy seems to view immigrants primarily as workers, and secondarily as humans. This is illuminated by the government's treatment of people whose primary reason for coming to Ireland is not to contribute to the economy, but is to seek help. The supporters of the referendum believe that non-national (African and eastern European) women are coming into the state to effectively "steal" Irish citizenship for their babies without establishing any connection with the state. They are basing this accusation off of "anecdotal"

¹¹³ "Myths adding to racism, survey find" *The Irish Examiner*. 30 April 2002.

evidence, when in fact there are few evident incidences of this abuse. In addition, the referendum was held in a country where unsophisticated views on racial and ethnic differences are prevalent. It is dangerous to mix widespread ignorance and misinformation about multiculturalism with a policy that deprives ‘multi-cultural’ children of rights.

Supporters of the referendum continually assert that “There should be a greater connection with the country before and entitlement to citizenship and all it entails, arises.”¹¹⁴ However, this assertion raises questions about what the amendment to the constitution is really protecting. It would be a more convincing argument if it had been applied evenly to citizenship law, however, the grandfather clause still exists. A person from South Africa, the United States or Australia can acquire Irish citizenship without ever setting foot in Ireland. According to government’s reasoning, this still makes them more ‘connected’ to Ireland than the children who are born on the island, many of whose parents are actively becoming connected to the country by “studying English, learning about Ireland, its culture, history and political system.”¹¹⁵ Given that the Irish diaspora is overwhelmingly white, the government’s preservation of the grandfather clause is *de facto* prejudiced. The only people who are automatically entitled to citizenship, without having to undergo the discretionary naturalization process, are Irish nationals and foreign nationals of Irish descent; these groups are primarily one race.

Despite these troubling perceptions of multi-culturalism, I want to make it clear that I don’t believe the Irish to be inherently racist. My experience in Ireland reflects this. However, the population is misinformed and has not had much experience with people of diverse

¹¹⁴*Dail Debates, Vol. 583, No. 6. 21st April 2004.*

¹¹⁵Letters to the Editor, “Please hear our voices on the citizenship debate” *The Sunday Independent*, 11th

backgrounds. It is my belief that the more exposure that the majority has with culturally diverse people, the more the population will realize that they actually share a variety of commonalities. This is reflected in a newspaper article that I read, in which twelve asylum-seekers were placed in Clogheen, a small south Tipperary village. Though they were initially greeted with hysteria, the village soon embraced them. Commenting on their integration, one resident said “They have all mixed in very well—some asylum-seekers play on the local soccer team and their kids were given a huge bag of toys by the locals at Christmas.”¹¹⁶ It is during this type of interaction that people get to know each; spending time with someone who is seemingly different from you is the best way to eradicate misunderstanding and prejudice. If the people of Ireland get to know its newcomers, especially the immigrants who seem the most threatening, multi-culturalism and acceptance will begin to develop. This narrative, written by a class of ESOL students, describes the plight that many people face in order to secure a better life for themselves and their families.

We consider the fact that we came to Ireland to be one of the bravest acts of our lives. We came without knowing the language, willing to take a chance, for the sake of our children, to try and build a safe and secure future for them. We are proud to be immigrants, to have overcome all sorts of difficulties and to be in Ireland, for which we have great respect. We fled from oppressive regimes where war, torture and persecution prevailed. Some of us left for economic reasons, of course. We wanted a better life for our children, as we already said.¹¹⁷

If the Irish population listened to the stories of some immigrants, like the one above, they would begin to understand that inherently, they want the same things: happiness, prosperity, acceptance and the best possible life for their children.

April 2004.

¹¹⁶*The Irish Times*, 11 May 2004.

¹¹⁷Letters to the Editor, “Please hear our voices on the citizenship debate” *The Sunday Independent*, 11th April 2004.

