Steering a course somewhere between hegemonic discourses of Irishness

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The shift from emigration to immigration is, indeed, an epochal change in European social history over the last 50 years. Perfectly understandably, because of Ireland’s belated development, it is only now directly affecting this country (Irish Times editorial, Friday, June 6, 1997).

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“The modern multi-cultural, multi-coloured world has finally hit Dublin and we can no longer see Ireland as a green pasture packed with white faces”, says Bobby Eager a prominent immigration lawyer (quoted by Paul Cullen. Irish Times, Saturday, May 17, 1997).

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If you see a country as its people rather than its territory, then, far from being small and well-defined, Ireland has been, for at least 150 years, scattered, splintered, atomised like the windscreen of a crashed car...Ireland is a diaspora, and as such is both a real place and a remembered place, both the far west of Europe and the home back east of the Irish-American (O’Toole 1994, p. 27).

News about immigrants in the media, even when apparently ‘neutral’, tends to have negative dimensions (van Dijk, forthcoming). Tuen van Dijk’s critical study of news reports and their role in the reproduction of ‘racial and ethnic inequality’ found a systematic negative portrayal of immigration and ‘Others’ and positive images of ‘Us’. The nation, or the ‘we’, he argues, is either represented as ‘victims’, or as taking action against the ‘threat’ of immigration. In this way, discourses of immigration are constitutive of the ‘Us’, the nation and national identity.

My aim in this paper is to consider the ways in which ‘They’, whether they be immigrants, refugees or emigrants, are invoked in order to represent an ‘Us’ and an Irishness for the late twentieth century. There is evidence within some parts of the Irish (print) media of a less straightforward use of Us/Them dichotomy, than that identified by van Dijk. This dichotomy is complicated by representations of immigration as potentially ‘enriching’ which are evident mainly in the pages of the Irish Times. Discourses of Irishness as ‘diasporic’, most evident in ex-President Mary Robinson’s speeches, also emphasize an expansion and enrichment of Irishness through the diaspora.

Contemporary discourses of immigration as ‘enrichment’, and discourses of the diaspora as expanding the boundaries of Irishness, can be seen as different responses to, what Wieviorka calls, the ‘crisis of modernity’. I argue in this paper, that they also represent different responses to questions of Irishness in an increasingly globalised era, and at a time when Irishness is being renegotiated north and south of the border.

What is this crisis in modernity? And how does it relate to Ireland? Michel Wieviorka (1998) characterizes the crisis in terms of a general cultural fragmentation that is related to the globalization of the economy, the development of mass society, mass consumption and a weakening of national societies. These processes are seen as leading to a disintegration of nation and state (see also Wieviorka, 1993 and 1996). In many western countries, he argues, ‘the state and nation are no longer the territorial, political and symbolic privileged framework for economic, social and cultural life...’ (1998, p. 74). There is a crisis then, in the assumed correspondence between economic and social life and between political and cultural life, which have been viewed primarily in terms of the nation-state (ibid.)

Gerard Delanty (1996) locates this discussion in relation to as a crisis in national identity in Western Europe. This is related to a ‘new' nationalism, which appeals to identity more than ideology, and whose ‘Other’ is more likely to be immigrants, than other

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1. Note, for example, the ways in which some politicians set out to make immigration and asylum seekers an election issue in the 1997 general election campaign, projecting debate about longstanding social inequalities and divisions onto the issue of refugees and immigrants. Thank you to Orla McDonnell for bringing this to my attention.

59 These discourses are generated largely by politicians and the media. The voices of immigrants and refugees themselves are rarely evident.

60 Discourses of Irishness as a diasporic identity are also articulated by columnists in the Irish Times newspaper, Fintan O’Toole and John Waters in particular.

61 Alain Touraine argues that ‘[t]he nation is modernity’s political form because it replaces traditions, customs and privileges with an integrated national space reconstructed by a law inspired by the principles of reason’ (1995, p. 135).

62 For Delanty (1996), ‘old nationalism’ was an ideology in
nation-states. Like Wievorka, he argues that there has been a decoupling of the nation from the state. New nationalisms are arising from below and are often articulated against the state, for example, the rise of militias in the United States (ibid.). However, the crisis of national identity, for Delany, is less about increased immigration, than the alienation and frustration arising from inequalities, social divisions and social exclusion. In other words, the national welfare state appears to have contributed little to the promotion of social citizenship and an inclusive national belonging. One response is to project the dissatisfaction that arises from continued social divisions and exclusions onto refugees and immigrants.

In this paper, I use the term ‘discourse’ to mean a way of constructing, organizing and classifying society. Following Foucault, I see it as an active political force that systematically produces, rather than reflects, ‘the objects of which we speak’ (1972, p. 49). In this way, it is possible to see discourses of diaspora and immigration as producing Irishness in the 1990s in particular ways. Teun A. van Dijk (forthcoming) argues that in a context of ‘new racism’ which is based on difference (often focussing on cultural incomensurability and the perceived social deficiencies of certain groups), and not on notions of biological inferiority, the symbolic and discursive take on a new significance. Politics and the media represent important discursive sites within which difference is constructed and reconstructed.

Discourses of immigration and of diaspora in Ireland are deeply ambivalent. This is because they often involve the negotiation of two competing hegemonic discourses of Irishness. One is a ‘postcolonial’ discourse of Irishness that constructs Irishness in terms of colonialism, decolonisation and the cultural legacies of these processes. This discourse often represents Irishness as a ‘victim’ identity marked by an ‘oppositional’ politics. Contemporary discourses of immigration and diaspora relegate this formation to the past as a resource to be mined in the present. The second is a more recent discourse of Irishness as a progressive European identity that is taking its place amongst the identities of developed Western countries. The discourse of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ represents one strand of this emerging hegemonic formulation of Irishness (see O’Hearn, 1998; Sweeney, 1998). Fintan O’Toole argues that ‘the newly rich Republic can hardly continue to claim membership of the oppressed, impoverished colonial world’ (Irish Times, December 4, 1998, p. 14).

However, such clear distinctions do not do justice to the complex negotiations of Irishness within 80 years of partition and independence for the south and within four years of the cease-fires in the north. In this paper, I focus on the ways in which discourses of Irishness as diasporic and some aspects of recent discourses of immigration are producing particular forms of Irishness for the 1990s. This paper is necessarily limited by such a focus because it does not deal with the prominence of discourses of immigration as ‘threat’ and the underlying nationalistic assumptions that Ireland should ‘look after its own’. However, my main concern, within the boundaries of this paper, is with those discourses that represent immigration or diaspora as expanding or enriching Irishness and which are most often articulated in the pages of the Irish Times newspaper.

Discourses of immigration

The discourse of immigration as ‘threat’ is probably the most prevalent one. This representation of immigration in Wievorka’s terms might be seen as resisting the crisis in modernity. This is because such discourses attempt to reintegrate the disintegrated features of nation and state, national identity and culture. These discourses often articulate a desire to (re)create a national identity that brings apparent unity to a socially and politically divided community. For example, Aine Ni Chonaill (who launched the Immigration Control Platform on January 13th, 1998 in Ennis Co. Clare) argues that Irish people have the right to the ‘integrity’ of the national ‘homeland’ (in Walsh, 1998). The discourse of immigration as ‘threat’ arises from the prevalence of the notion that the ideal society should be as uniform or homogeneous as possible (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998, p. 117). Homogeneity has come to be an implicit norm. Therefore, resistance against heterogeneity is regarded as normal.

While Ni Chonaill’s call for the maintenance of an Irish ‘homeland’ is seen as extremist, and she...
has not been able to command a significant following, it is important to note that many may share some of her underlying assumptions. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998), for example, point to the continuing purchase of the nationalist ideal of the homogenous nation state (albeit a recent historical invention; see Hobsbawm, 1990). They argue that the viewing of 'diversity as a problem' is 'what the "tolerant majority" tends to share with the extreme right' (ibid, p. 3).

The anti-immigration discourse feeds on people's fears that they may lose out because of the crisis of welfare state and immigrants' demands on national resources. Instead of engaging with the crisis of social citizenship and the existence of a transnational flow of migrants, there is an attempt to reintegrate nation, state, culture and 'the people' through the exclusion of immigrants.

The discourse of immigration as 'enrichment' can be seen as an attempt to 'manage' difference and is often allied to calls for celebration of 'multicultural' society. For example, Oliver O'Connor (an investment consultant) stated the following in an article in the Irish Times:

Some refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants are a gift of intellectual capital, which simply arrives free of charge at our national doorstep. We would be mad to ignore it. Others contribute by setting up small businesses. Others will do what jobs they can. In total, they are very few in numbers. We have much to gain and nothing to lose from managing our small diversity well (Irish Times, 13 March, 1998; emphasis added).

These sentiments reflect those of management consultants and academics in the United States for whom 'managing diversity' is seen as moving beyond equal opportunities and affirmative action programmes towards enabling organizations to 'celebrate' diversity (Roosevelt-Thomas, 1990; Greenslade, 1991).

Managing diversity, according to Roosevelt-Thomas, (Executive Director of the American Institute of Managing Diversity Inc.) 'is no longer simply a question of common decency, it is a question of business survival' (1990, p. 108). Questions arise as to on whose terms, and in whose interests diversity is 'celebrated' (see Gray, 1995). There is little evidence of such an explicit 'management of diversity' approach in Irish media discourses of immigration, however, an emphasis on the positive contribution that immigrants might make is evident. One Irish Times editorial had the following to say:

A recent survey indicated that the majority of asylum seekers are well educated and capable of providing for their own needs. They should be encouraged to contribute in a full and positive way to this society. Our own history of emigration demands such a response (Irish Times, Wednesday, July 8, 1998, p. 15).

The discourse of immigration as 'enrichment' is an abstract discourse based on the potentially enriching contribution that immigrants might make to Irish society. These discourses are invariably articulated in the future tense. They point to possibilities rather than a return to some putative past state of harmony and homogeneity. They are framed in terms of an inclusive 'we' who can gain from immigration. If we create the right circumstances, there is the potential for us to benefit from the presence of immigrants:

When refugees are allowed to rebuild their lives, they can enrich the society around them. If given the chance, they can contribute to our society. Recent European history has shown that anyone can become a refugee. It behoves us all to guarantee the highest levels of protection to those who do (Maura Leen, 'Ireland has a moral duty to welcome the displaced, Irish Times, 16, September, 1997).

A moral obligation to welcome refugees is articulated here alongside an appeal to the collective public interest and the potential enrichment that refugees would bring if given the chance. Appeals to the collective interest tend to be abstract and appear distant from immediate concerns (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998). These characteristics make such arguments difficult to sustain. However, this discourse is made more concrete in the Irish context by making connections between immigration as contributing to Irish society and the Irish experience of emigration.

For example, the following quotes draw on a national past and memory of emigration to bring the circumstances of immigrants closer to home. They also imply a moral obligation in the present based on our national history:

While we fear economic migrants to our “tiger” economy, it is ironic that in the 1980s a generation of Irish saw the Morrison and Donnelly visas as passports to economic well-being and opportunity in the USA (Maura Leen, ‘Ireland has a moral duty to welcome the displaced’, Irish Times, 16, September, 1997).

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68 Questions of the close alliance between ‘whiteness’ and Irishness at official and popular levels have barely begun to be addressed.

69 More than half of the workforce in the US now (i.e. late 1980s) consists of women, minorities and immigrants; this proportion will have increased to 80% by the year 2000 (Hanamura, 1989).

70 It is also important to recognise that many arrive without high level skills and encounter language difficulties in negotiating their everyday lives here. These needs also need to be acknowledged and provided for.

71 One obvious association between the plight of immigrants to Ireland and that of Irish emigrants in the past was made by Garda Joe McCarthy when he said: ‘I have served in Wexford for 30 years and this was the closest to a coffin ship I ever saw’ (in Kathy Sheridan, Irish Times, Saturday, August 8, 1998, p. 9).
The Irish state’s attempt in the 1980s, to finds ways of legitimating Irish migrants’ entry to the US is presented as a concrete challenge to our fear of immigration. The category ‘economic migrant’, which is often used to delegitimize immigration to Ireland, is ‘brought home’ as Leen associates the lobbying for American visas with Irish ‘economic migrants’. The following quote brings the phenomenon of Irish emigration and its relevance to current immigration even closer to home by invoking the trope of the ‘family’:

A little more compassion and less vitriol is essential from all sectors of our society, a society which has benefited immensely over the past 150 years from the generosity of spirit and kindness of other nations in accepting into their countries our relatives and friends and offering them the opportunity for happiness and prosperity (Niall Andrews MEP letter to Irish Times, Monday, July 20, 1998, p. 13; emphasis added).

The possessive pronoun ‘our’ is invoked in both cases as an ‘ingroup designator’. However, it is used less to establish a clear contrast between Us and Them, as van Dijk found, and more to trouble such a dichotomy. Our history of ‘economic migration’ is invoked in order to complicate the ‘ingroup-outgroup’ polarization that marks most media discourses on immigration. Instead of using the possessive pronoun ‘our’ to relate to our nation in a territorially bounded nationalist sense, it is invoked to characterize a diasporic ‘national history’.

In both of the above quotes ‘our emigration’ is pushed into the past as a resource for dealing with a present marked by immigration. The following quote from Fintan O’Toole pushes our experience of emigration even further into the past as it re-emerges in his account as memory:

No one would deny that immigration, like any other social change, needs to be managed and prepared for. No one would suggest that there is no need for laws, processes and policies. But underlying those policies must be a memory of the experience of Irish people over the generations (Fintan O’Toole, ‘Immigrants do not have to be seen as a problem’, Irish Times, October 31 1997, p. 14).

In these quotes, the experiences of generations of Irish emigrants are reconstructed into a ‘useable past’ that can frame a more inclusive and liberal discourse of immigration to Ireland in the present. Ireland and Irishness are positioned as a post-emigration country and identity. Emigration and immigration are produced as distinct experiences and implicitly linked with the past and present respectively. Contemporary emigration, particularly that of the less well educated and less well off, is once again, edited out of public analyses and debate.

The increasing stratification of the national and global labour market resulting in continued emigration and the increased numbers of young destitute Irish presenting at Irish Centres in England (and elsewhere) are made invisible in this representation of Irishness as taking its place among the modern ‘Western’ identities of the world.

I want to argue that emigration and immigration cannot be separated, either as distinct phenomena, or in time, as appears to happen in these accounts. One means of bringing these phenomena into engagement with one another is via the term ‘diaspora’. James Clifford (1994) argues that the term ‘diaspora’ is now ‘loose in the world’ and is being applied to many groups because it helps to describe their experiences. This term is increasingly invoked to describe the large number of transnational populations characterized by multiple allegiances. The term diaspora privileges the idea of multi-located identities. This experience of multiple membership has led, according to Baubock (1991), to the development of ‘interstate societies’.

However, the use of the term ‘diaspora’ in contemporary theory is much contested (see Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1996; Gilroy, 1993, Safran, 1991; Tololy, 1991; Van Hear, 1998). A major weakness in the theorization of diaspora is the emphasis on cultural phenomena and identity formations, often without reference to structural features of, and constraints upon, diasporic groups. My concern in the next section of this paper relates more to the recent emergence of discourses of Irishness as diasporic and the relationships, if any, between these and discourses of immigration.

Discourses of diaspora

The use of the term diaspora to represent identity formations or communities is more possible now, according to Wiewiorka (1998), precisely because of the lack of correspondence between nation and state, the economic, social, cultural and political. Wiewiorka is conscious of varying meanings and definitions of diasporic communities and identities. He argues that one diasporic logic focuses on historic trauma and the maintenance of a mythic relationship with the point of departure. Another diasporic logic centres on, what he calls the softer process of emigration, when migrants maintain strong links with...

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16. Of course there is a lot of evidence from Britain, the United States and Australia that the Irish were not always welcomed with such openness.

74 While 39,200 immigrated to Ireland in 1996, 31,200 people emigrated from Ireland in the same year (Central Statistics Office, Population and Migration Estimates, April, 1997).

75 Van Hear (1998) notes that the formation of diasporas and transnational communities is not an inevitable concomitant of increased migration. He argues that if diaspora has accelerated in recent years, so also has the ‘unmaking of diasporas’ via the regrouping of migrant communities often via return to their places of origin.
their country of origin, as well as the countries they live in. Of course, the Irish diaspora has been characterized in both of these terms, but can also be seen in terms of Wieviorka’s third formulation of diaspora. This is a kind of self-production in which a group creates its cultural identity ‘and gives to this production a trans-frontier dimension’ (p. 73).

The most important aspect here, is not the point of departure, but the creativity of the group. The diaspora is not an ascription, but an achieved status and identity. Wieviorka argues that this diaspora is less about traditions and reproduction than about inclusion in modernity and self-production. The very notion of diaspora is, in this case, developed by the group itself as a resource. He offers Paul Gilroy’s (1993) ‘Black Atlantic’ as an example of this logic of diaspora. In the ‘Black Atlantic’, Blacks ‘are supposed to be able to articulate their social and racial inclusion in various societies and their transnational cultural existence’ (Wieviorka, 1998). The logic of diaspora becomes visible in the various cultural activities and innovations ranging from music, dance and literature to sport. Diaspora offers the individuals who constitute it, ‘a chance simultaneously to belong to a specific group, with its own identity, and to participate in the general life of the country where they live’ (ibid. p. 75). In this way, according to Wieviorka, the logic of diaspora can be seen as engaging with the crisis of modernity rather than reacting to it.

The discourse of Irishness as diasporic, which emerged in the 1990s, incorporates all of the elements of diaspora outlined by Wieviorka. First, the historic trauma of the Famine and associated emigration; second, the process of emigration, where emigrants keep contact with their country of origin; and third, the self-production of a transnational identity. Like the discourse of immigration as ‘enrichment’, the discourse of Irishness as diasporic also emphasizes ‘enrichment’. For example, in her speech to a joint session of the Houses of the Oireachtas entitled ‘Cherishing the Diaspora’ President Mary Robinson stated:

[O]ur relation with the diaspora beyond our shores is one which can instruct our society in the values of diversity, tolerance, and fair-mindedness. The men and women of our diaspora represent not simply a series of departures and loss...We need to accept that in their new perspectives may well be a critique of our old ones (Robinson, 1995).

The Irish diaspora is represented here as a pluralist and progressive entity that has the potential to enrich and expand our sense of Irishness. Yet, like discourses of immigration as ‘enrichment’, discourses of diaspora also tend to operate at an abstract level. As a potentially all-inclusive concept, it is difficult to pin down diaspora temporally or spatially. It comes to represent everything and nothing at the same time. This may partly account for the rather negative and lack lustre political and public response to the President’s speech. Indeed, Paul Byrne’s attempt to rescue the significance of the speech for Irish society emphasized the more concrete implications of diaspora for Irish families (see Byrne, 1995).

As well as ex-President Mary Robinson, media commentators such as Fintan O’Toole and John Waters in the Irish Times, and Anne Holohan for the Irish Post in England, as well as philosopher Richard Kearney emphasize a new less bounded sense of Irishness (see Kearney 1988, 1990 and 1997). Fintan O’Toole asserts that ‘[e]migration means, quite simply, that the people and the land are no longer coterminous’ (1994, p. 18). Anne Holohan suggests that ‘for younger Irish people their Irishness has nothing to do with territorial sovereignty or where they live’ (1995, p. 7). John Waters likens the diaspora to the Irish soccer team: ‘any team, band or group purporting to be Irish would not be an accurate representation of Ireland unless it contained people who were born somewhere else’ (1994, p. 130). While I would not be as skeptical as Mark Ryan, who argues that this cultural diasporic identity is being produced for the consumption and self-production of the Irish middle-classes (1995, p. 21), I think it is important to recognize the limits of this discourse and its exclusions in spite of its repetitive theme of inclusiveness.

Despite the ‘inclusiveness’ and ‘enrichment’ that marks this discourse, these sentiments are not evident when it comes to the concrete issue of political participation. In the debate in 1996, regarding the constitutional amendment to allow representation for emigrants in Seanad Eireann (for up to 20 years after they emigrated), regardless of their Irish citizenship, emigrants were largely represented as ‘outsiders’ and the proposal was dropped. The extent to which emigrant belonging has been relegated only to the realm of cultural belonging is alluded to in a letter to the Irish Post (England) which suggested that ‘[e]migrants appear destined to occupy only the St. Patrick’s Day constituency, when government ministers jet all over the world to pay lip service to them’ (Michael Hurley, Irish Post, November 2, 1996).
p. 10). The emigrant, as potential voter, is represented less in terms of potential ‘enrichment’ and more in terms of ‘threat’. The concrete issue of political participation, during the debate about emigrant representation, lapsed into an appeal to national self-interest in which a more transnational refugiation of the political was seen, at best, as a ‘romantic’ notion. Wieviorka’s three logics of diaspora: historical trauma, contact with country of origin and cultural production operate at a cultural or symbolic level but do not translate easily into new forms of political belonging.

The ‘enrichment’ that the discourse of Irishness as diasporic celebrates is partly mined from the past, which may account for the limits of this discourse when it comes to new political imaginings in the present. Commemoration of the Famine and associated emigration is an important feature of this discourse. In her speech at the Famine commemoration ceremonies in Millstreet Co. Cork in May 1997, Mary Robinson noted that the event was:

> a dignified commemoration of all those who died during the Great Famine of 1845-50 and...a tribute to those who succeeded in their terrible journey to the New World...In its way the memory of the emigrant steerage has long been held as an icon in Ireland’s oppression...but we must also remember that most Irish emigrants made it safely to the other side during the famine years and initiated the creation of a new, Irish, Diaspora (Robinson, 1997).

This form of diasporic remembering may be seen as a symptom of what Bhabha (1996, p. 59) calls the ‘anxious age of identity’ in which the attempt to memorialize past time, authorizes different identities in the present. The act of commemoration can, by juxtaposing ‘us’ and ‘them’, channel the present through the past in order to produce a modern and ‘new, Irish Diaspora’. Those who died and emigrated during and after the famine become both a sign of violence and of ‘progress’ out of which a cosmopolitan Irish diaspora emerges (Chow, 1993, p. 45).

Yet, this ‘modern’ identity is haunted by a moral debt to those who have left and those who have survived adversity. In her speech at Gross Isle in Canada in 1994, President Robinson noted that:

> It is also our sense, as a people who suffered and survived that our history does not entitle us to a merely private catalogue of memories. Instead it challenges us to consider......with compassion and anger those other children to whom we can give no name who are dying today in Rwanda and whom I saw in the camps in Somalia (Robinson 1994).

The commemoration of the Famine is represented as a self-reflexive gesture, which establishes a relationship with the present, we remember the Famine but discover ourselves in the 1990s. Irishness in the present is (re)negotiated here as a globally located and implicated identity.

Commemoration, in the discourse of diaspora, like the relegation of emigration to the past in the discourse of immigration as ‘enrichment’, involves the negotiation of Ireland’s contradictory position as a country that has experienced colonization, Famine and emigration and that now defines itself as the ‘Celtic Tiger’. Commemoration of former times of dispossession, starvation and poverty may help to resolve difficult moral dilemmas, as Irish citizens at home and abroad try to steer a course somewhere between discourses of Irishness as ‘postcolonial’, European and global. Discourses of diaspora and immigration render this identity crisis visible as each reveal an uneasy negotiation of a moral and responsible Irishness in relation to the past, present and indeed the future.

**Conclusion**

This paper is an initial consideration of how we might begin to consider the unique position of Ireland in relation to both emigration and immigration. I have looked at how these phenomena are discursively produced and pointed to intersections between some discourses of immigration and diaspora. I have argued that both these discourses incorporate contradictory responses to the ‘crisis of modernity’ and uncertainties about Irishness at the end of the millennium. In other words, the ‘crises’ in the projects of national identity (including social citizenship) and Irish identity in the 1990s are partly channelled through discourses of immigration and diaspora.

Instead of being two distinct expressions of these ‘crises’, these discourses overlap and intersect in many ways. Both represent notions of a transnational experience that can be seen as ‘enriching’, but they also incorporate a sense of the transnational as ‘threat’. The impetus, in these discourses, towards notions of ‘enrichment’ can be seen as a positive force for the refiguring of the national. Yet, the national re-emerges in both as a persistent reference point. Also, these discourses operate at such an abstract level that they can either lack momentum, or evoke a reactionary response. These are all issues that require further investigation.

For Wieviorka (1998), the development of the concept of diaspora to represent the experiences of many groups at the end of the twentieth century, can be seen as an engagement with the crisis in modernity that requires looking beyond national boundaries. Yet, the production of Irishness as a diasporic identity may be seen as involving the self-construction of the southern state, at least as much as representing a transnational Irishness. Discourses of diaspora and immigration involve the negotiation of Irishness at a time when the southern state is struggling to find an acceptable moral path between its past and its present. If we are, as Delanty (1996) advocates, ‘to see more closely under what circumstances a genuinely post-national identity can be constructed’, it may be
necessary to shift these discourses into the present. Calls for the implementation of the Refugee Act and for an open discussion of public policy on immigration in the present appear to go unheard. Ongoing exclusions receive passing attention while continuing emigration remains a taboo subject.

It seems easier to remember the past, the Famine, even 1980s emigrants than to remember those leaving today. They are as much part of our 1990s Ireland as those who are returning and as other immigrants. We are living a transnational Irishness now, but it cannot be neatly packaged into a past and present associated respectively with a ‘postcolonial’ or ‘Celtic Tiger’ Ireland. Perhaps we need to face the kind of Irishness we have in the 1990s with all its contradictions and brutal exclusions. Then perhaps we can begin to address the kind of Irishness we want as we enter the new millennium.

References


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