



Introduction

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Citation: P. McDonagh (2020)
Introduction. *Sijis* 10: pp. 15-20.
doi: SIJIS-2239-3978-11749

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Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

As recently as November 1988, the then Minister for Justice, Gerry Collins, speaking in *Seanad Éireann* during the Second Stage of the Prohibition of Incitement to Racial, Religious or National Hatred Bill, remarked that Ireland was “essentially a homogeneous society” and “despite our membership of the European Community and, therefore, our close relationship with a number of societies which are becoming increasingly multiracial, the racial structure of this country is unlikely to change significantly for some time to come”¹. As a result, Collins argued that the “legislation we are now debating may not appear to have the same immediacy for us as for some other countries” (*ibidem*).

For some minorities such as Ireland’s Traveller community and gay community², among others, however, there was an immediate need for such legislation, yet, they found themselves excluded from the original bill introduced by Collins. Only after considerable lobbying from the opposition benches and NGOs did Collins relent and include the Traveller community in the bill, but he steadfastly defended the exclusion of sexual orientation. It was not until he was succeeded as Minister for Justice by Ray Burke in 1989 that sexual orientation was included in the bill. The bill’s passage and subsequent signing into law by President Patrick Hillery was heralded as historic, signifying Ireland’s commitment to the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Moreover, it was the first time in the history of the state that a positive piece of legislation had been enacted for Ireland’s gay community, all the more significant at a time when sexual activity between males was a criminal offence. Furthermore, it sent a strong message that Ireland would not tolerate hatred against individuals because of their race, colour,

¹ *Seanad Éireann* debate, 121, 9, 30 November 1988, “Prohibition of Incitement to Racial, Religious or National Hatred Bill”, 1988, Committee Stage (Resumed).

² I use gay community in this context as this was the term commonly used in the 1980s, which referred to gay and lesbian individuals, rather than the more contemporary term LGBT community, which refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.

nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, membership of the Traveller community or sexual orientation³. In other words, the bill gave recognition to the existence of a number of minorities in Ireland who needed to be protected from discrimination; in itself a welcome development within a so-called “homogenous society”.

Whereas Collins viewed Ireland as a homogenous society in the late 1980s, this is certainly not the case today. A look at the 2011 census reveals that 544,357 non-Irish nationals were living in the Republic of Ireland, an increase of 143% since 2002, representing 199 different nations⁴. In a country once renowned as a stronghold of Catholicism, the decline in the percentage of individuals who are Catholic was also significant. Whereas the proportion of the population who were Catholic declined, the twenty years between 1991 and 2011 saw significant increases in the non-Catholic population driven by “not only growing numbers with no religion but also large increases in the religions of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia”⁵. This was a period in which Ireland came to be a popular destination for many immigrants, mostly attributed to the impact of the “Celtic Tiger”. Crucially, this period marked a reversal in a long trend in Ireland’s history when emigration, rather than immigration, was the norm.

The 2011 census results led Deirdre Cullen, a senior statistician with the Central Statistics Office, to state that “Ireland has become an increasingly diverse society over the past decade and the different nationalities that make up the population of Ireland have an increasingly important impact on the economy and society”⁶. Pilar Villar-Argáiz maintains in her introduction to *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities* that this change is now reflected in Irish literature, noting that “one of the key developments in twenty-first-century Irish literature has been the rise to prominence of literature written by (and about) ethnic minorities from diverse origins, as a result of the unprecedented influx of non-Irish migrants to the Republic during the Celtic Tiger boom years”⁷. *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities* offers a strong defence of the merits and fruitfulness of exploring themes such as minorities and dissident identities, something this issue seeks to further build upon.

The change in Ireland’s demographics has coincided with a transformation in Ireland’s reputation as one of being a socially conservative society dominated by the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, to one of Ireland being a leading exemplar for human rights and tolerance throughout the world. This was most epitomised by the 2018 repeal of the eighth amendment of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, which had placed a constitutional ban on abortion since the divisive referendum of 1983, and the 2015 marriage equality referendum. The results of both referendums signalled a new dawn in Ireland’s history; the emergence of a more tolerant and accepting society in the twenty-first century than that which had preceded it. Speaking after

³ Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989, <<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1989/act/19/enacted/en/html>> (05/2020).

⁴ Central Statistics Office, Census 2011 Results, “Profile 6 Migration and Diversity – A Profile of Diversity in Ireland”, 4 October 2012, <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile6/PR_xxxx_Profile_6_Migration_a...pdf> (05/2020).

⁵ Central Statistics Office, Census 2011 Results, “Profile 7 Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers – Ethnic and Cultural Background in Ireland”, 18 October 2012, <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile7/Profile_7_Press_Release_Religion,_Ethnicity_and_Irish_Travellers.pdf> (05/2020).

⁶ Central Statistics Office, Census 2011 Results, “Profile 6 Migration and Diversity – A Profile of Diversity in Ireland”, 4 October 2012, <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile6/PR_xxxx_Profile_6_Migration_a...pdf> (05/2020).

⁷ Pilar Villar-Argáiz ed., (2018), *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 10.

the 2018 referendum, Leo Varadkar, then Ireland's *Taoiseach* and first openly gay man to hold that office, described the referendum result as "Ireland's second chance to treat everyone equally and with compassion and respect"⁸. A similar tone was expressed in Enda Kenny's (*Taoiseach* from 2011-2017) speech following the 2015 referendum, in which he stated that "with today's Yes vote we have disclosed who we are – a generous, compassionate, bold and joyful people. Yes to inclusion. Yes to generosity. Yes to love, and Yes to equal marriage"⁹. Anecdotally many have remarked that the 2015 result represented more than simply Irish society granting LGBT citizens access to the institution of marriage but also it symbolised Irish society expressing its acceptance of LGBT citizens. Two years earlier, in another seminal moment in Ireland's history, Kenny had taken to the floor of *Dáil Éireann* to apologise on behalf of the Irish state to women sent to Magdalene laundries. In the intervening period between the 2015 marriage equality referendum and the 2018 abortion referendum, Ireland passed other legislation which furthered its new reputation as a more tolerant society, namely the 2015 Gender Recognition Act and the 2017 recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority.

For many individuals who grew up in twentieth-century Ireland, however, words such as compassion, respect, inclusion, generosity, equality, expressed in both Enda Kenny's and Leo Varadkar's speeches, are words which they may not have associated with Ireland. For those who found themselves in the position of being in the minority, whether because of their race, ethnicity, creed, language, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, or simply because they did not conform to the restrictive social norms of the period, i.e. those who engaged in sexual activity outside marriage, unwed mothers, children born outside of wedlock, sex workers, divorcees, etc., words such as cold, intolerant, stigma, lonely, isolated, shame may have more accurately summed up their views of Irish society.

Whereas today Ireland celebrates its newfound reputation as a tolerant and inclusive society on the international stage, there is much still to be explored in terms of how Ireland has undergone such a dramatic transformation in a relatively short period. In reality, this transformation is the direct result of the efforts, struggles and sacrifices of individuals who refused to succumb to years of marginalisation, hostility and othering, and instead confronted and challenged a system which treated them as second class citizens simply because they found themselves in the position of being in the minority or marginalised for daring to ignore social norms. While not every individual who was part of a minority community found themselves isolated, discriminated or shunned, many more did, and they had to fight to have their voices heard and respected. They had to fight to broaden the very definition of what constituted "Irishness" and who could claim to be "Irish".

It is within this context that the tenth issue of *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* focuses on "Minorities in/and Ireland". In thinking about "Minorities" the call for papers adopted a broad perspective to include, but not limited to, those who did not fit or conform to societal norms, i.e. sex workers, those sent to institutional homes, members of the LGBT community, but also those who found themselves in the minority based on their race, disability, ethnicity, creed, membership of the Traveller community, migrants/refugees/asylum seekers, and linguistic minorities. "Minorities in/and Ireland" sought to bring minorities in from the

⁸ "Speech by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar following the declaration on the Referendum on the Eighth Amendment", *MerrionStreet.ie*, 27 May 2018, <https://merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Speeches/Speech_by_An_Taoiseach_Leo_Varadkar_following_the_declaration_on_the_Referendum_on_the_Eighth_Amendment.html> (05/2020).

⁹ "Speech by An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, T.D. on the Marriage Equality Referendum", 23 May 2015, <<https://www.finegael.ie/speech-by-an-taoiseach-enda-kenny-t-d-on-the-marriage-equality-referendum/>> (05/2020).

periphery and bring them to the fore to address issues such as how have minorities/marginalised communities sought to make their voices heard in Ireland; what strategies have they adopted to bring about social, political and cultural change; where were the sites of these efforts taking place; how have representations of minorities evolved over time; and what does it mean to be Irish. The essays included in the tenth issue represent a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds and methodological approaches such as literary studies; theatre/drama studies; disability studies; queer studies; and history.

“Minorities in/and Ireland” comprises ten essays divided up into four sections: “Queer Representations in Literature”; “Home and Away: Notions of Irishness”; “Theatre and Minorities’ (In)Visibility”; “Resilience: Travellers and Magdalene Survivors”, which broadly address issues such as: the representation of LGBT individuals, exiles, migrants, and refugees in Irish literature; LGBT migrants and political activism; the role of theatre as a medium of giving voice to minorities like Ireland’s Jewish community and those with disabilities; and the resilience of Ireland’s Traveller community and survivors of Magdalene Laundries. The essays are not confined to one period, instead, they span from the late 1800s to the present day, covering both the North and South of Ireland as well as regions outside Ireland.

The first section, “Queer Representations in Literature”, comprises three essays by Zsuzsanna Balázs, Anna Charczun and Seán Mac Risteaird. Broadly all three essays focus on the changing representation of queer identities or non-normative subjectivities in Irish literature against the backdrop of Irish nationalism, strict social and sexual norms, and the influential and powerful position of a puritanical Roman Catholic Church. Balázs paper explores W.B. Yeats’s *The Land of Heart’s Desire* (1889) and Edward Martyn’s *The Heather Field* (1899) to emphasise the extent to which the mainstream cultural framework of the supernatural was adopted to express same-sex intimacies in code. In contrast, Charczun’s and Mac Risteaird’s essays explore the emergence of more open and explicit same-sex themes in Irish literature in the latter years of the twentieth century. Charczun’s essay discusses the works of two leading Irish lesbian authors, Mary Dorsey and Emma Donoghue, who, she contends, have pioneered overt rather than covert “lesbian desire to Irish literary fiction”. Mac Risteaird continues this theme but with a focus on the emergence of Irish-language literature which seeks to “reflect queer Irish-language lives”. Through an analysis of texts by Micheál Ó Conghaile and Pádraig Standún, Mac Risteaird maintains that both authors pioneered bold new themes in Irish-language literature, thereby introducing themes that Mac Risteaird maintains spoke to, and for, a community within a community and for a minority within a minority. The juxtaposition of Balázs’ essay with that of Charczun’s and Mac Risteaird’s provides readers with an insight in how authors in one period had to adopt certain strategies to covertly write about queer identities compared to more recent years when the issue of queer identities can be much more explicitly and overtly discussed in Irish literature.

The second section, “Home and Away: Notions of Irishness”, encompasses three essays by Daryl Leeworthy, Rania M Rafik Khalil and Kaitlin Thurlow. Broadly all three essays explore, within different contexts and periods, what it meant to be Irish or what constituted “Irishness”, and related to that the notion of “home”. The essays explore a multitude of actors such as members of the LGBT community, migrants/emigrants/immigrants, and refugees/asylum seekers as a means to deconstruct the aforementioned concepts. The section begins with Daryl Leeworthy’s essay on gay Irish migrants and their impact on LGBT politics in 1980s London. Leeworthy’s essay is particularly welcomed in an area of Irish historiography that is still in its infancy and provides a strong defence of the importance of adopting a transnational approach

in writing queer history. Rania M Rafik Khalil, in contrast, focuses on the experiences of the returned Irish migrant and asylum seekers/refugees in her postcolonial analysis of Tom Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985) and Donal O'Kelly's *Asylum! Asylum!* (1994) and *The Cambria* (2005). Khalil's essay offers an insight into perceptions on migration from Ireland and the difficulties of immigration to modern-day Ireland. In doing so, Khalil brings to the fore questions of who is Irish and who is not. In a similar vein Thurlow's focus on two contemporary novels, Edna O'Brien's *The Little Red Chairs* (2015) and Donal Ryan's *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018), sets the stage for exploring the difficulties of belonging as a person living in exile. Thurlow contends that both novels represent a move by contemporary Irish authors to revisit the concept of exile to reveal "how issues of racism, poverty and exploitation hold a mirror to social problems in a rapidly evolving nation". All three essays are particularly timely during a period in which borders and the free movement of people are proving to be highly contested issues on the world stage.

The third section, "Theatre and Minorities' (In)Visibility", comprises two essays by Barry Montgomery and Monica Randaccio. Combined Montgomery's and Randaccio's essays offer an analysis of how the medium of theatre has been used by minorities as a means to give them a greater voice and representation, while at the same time drawing attention to the issues that directly affected them, issues often neglected by mainstream society. Through a study of the Dublin Jewish Amateur Operatic Society and the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Society, Montgomery traces the emergence of an increasing Irish Jewish population and Irish-Jewish cultural voice in the first half of the twentieth century. Montgomery's essay seeks to establish the extent to which theatre provided a public voice for Ireland's Jewish community. Similarly, Randaccio's paper provides a historical study of the development of disability theatre in Ireland. Randaccio's paper moves from its historical evolution in Ireland to explore how it has been portrayed in the work and activism of Kaite O'Reilly *Face On: Disability Arts in Ireland and Beyond* (2007); Yvonne Lynch, a practitioner and academic; and Rosaleen McDonagh, a Traveller, actress, and playwright with a disability.

Randaccio's paper provides a nice segue into the fourth and final section, "Resilience: Travellers and Magdalene Survivors", which concludes with a focus on two groups that, for many years, have been treated as second class citizens and until only recently have seen efforts by the state to acknowledge the wrongs of the past: Ireland's Traveller community, and survivors of the Magdalene laundries. Both essays by Micháel Ó hAodha and Erin Costello Wecker provide an insight into the resilience, determination and tactics of these individuals as well as the wrongs inflicted by an uncaring/judgemental state and society. Ó hAodha's paper, through an exploration of *Ortha an Ghreama*, contends that one means by which Irish Travellers resisted their demonisation as the "negative other" was through symbolic inversion in folk narratives. This tactic helped to portray Travellers in a non-prejudicial light, thereby challenging the negative images commonly associated with them. Costello Wecker's case study analysis of the victim's advocacy group Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) takes Enda Kenny's February 2013 apology to the women of the Magdalene laundries as the basis to contextualise the JFM's transition from restorative justice to transitional justice. In doing so, Costello Wecker stresses the limits of Kenny's apology while at the same time reinforcing the importance of "listening" to the voices of marginalised groups and the implications of failing to do so. A central focus of Wecker's paper is the innovative strategies adopted by marginalised groups like JFM to amplify their voices in their quest for justice.

This issue seeks to build on the emerging scholarly literature which acknowledges and studies the impact and contribution of minorities on the development of Ireland, Irish society and Irish studies. In doing so, such efforts help to deconstruct the very notion of Irishness. It

is through the efforts of the subjects discussed in this issue that Ireland today can claim to be a more tolerant, progressive and diverse society. Much more work is required to contextualise their contribution fully. In saying that, while Ireland has become a more tolerant and accepting society for many, we should not become complacent. There are more struggles still to be fought to bring about a truly equal society. In particular, we should not forget our brothers and sisters languishing away in direct provision centres throughout Ireland today. This issue should act as a reminder of how important it is to respect minorities and to promote equality, respect and the defence of basic human rights when introducing policy and laws. During a period in which right-wing populism has seen a considerable resurgence, the stories discussed here remind us of how dangerous/disastrous a politics of othering and demonisation can be. Now, more than ever, we need to stand up for the rights of minorities.

I want to conclude by thanking all the authors and anonymous reviewers for making this issue possible. I want also to thank the General Editor Fiorenzo Fantaccini, Journal Manager Arianna Antonielli, and Dieter Reinisch for their constant support and guidance from start to finish. It has been a pleasure to work with everyone involved, and it has been a process that I will look back on with very fond memories. Thank you all.

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