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## **NATION, MIGRATION AND IDENTITIES IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRELAND**

This paper, which relies on empirical data that the author has collected over the six last years in Ireland, critically analyses the concept of "people of Irish extraction". It questions the meaning of this appellation at the time Irish elites have produced an open and inclusive representation of Irishness. It also explains how the Irish population abroad has been instrumentalised by Irish politicians and elites in order to boost the Irish economy and to defend the peace process. The author refers to the Irish Genealogical Project in order to illustrate this.

Keywords: Irish identities, Irish nationalism, migrant-nation, roots-tourism

### **Introduction**

As a result of massive emigration, the phase of population growth, which became more pronounced in mid-eighteenth century Ireland, stopped, and a significant decline occurred in the Irish population. While millions of people left Ireland in the nineteenth-century,<sup>1</sup> censuses show a permanent decline in the Irish population between 1841 and 1961. In 1961, there were 4.2 million people on the whole island, just above half the 8.2 million

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<sup>1</sup> Although emigration from Ireland represents a large-scale phenomenon at that time, such a movement is not exceptional. As regards migratory outflows from other European countries, quantitative data show that more than 12 million people left Italy for the United States between the mid 1860s and the mid 1920s, while only 4.5 million Irish emigrants chose the same destination between 1851 and 1921 (Mac Laughlin 1994).

enumerated in the 1841 Census. In 1992, while statistics indicate that 3.5 million people lived in the Republic of Ireland, the Irish government estimated that 70 million people from all over the world could claim Irish ancestry.<sup>2</sup> It is said that these individuals self-identify and are referred to by people living in Ireland as "people of Irish extraction". I argue that this term should be taken as an issue with regard to elite discourses, Irish nationalist ideologies and the political instrumentalization of genealogy.

This paper is based on ethnographic research and empirical data that I have collected in the Republic of Ireland over the past six years. I use a phenomenological approach to examine the discursive meanings of "being of Irish extraction" and I explore the social functions of designations understood here as a means to classify national and trans-national identities. After critically analysing the meanings of "being of Irish extraction", I demonstrate the strategic uses of this term by Irish people themselves, at a time when Irish politicians have produced a definition of Irishness that deeply contradicts former nationalist ideologies. Subsequently, I examine the changing attitudes of the Irish government towards representing the nation and acting on emigration. At the same time, I question the vision of Ireland as a completely "open" nation that the political elite and the media developed in the late 1980s. Finally, I provide concrete illustrations of how the so-called "people of Irish extraction" have been massively transformed into tourists for the expansion of the national economy.

### **1. "Being of Irish extraction": meanings and social implications**

In this section, I discuss some accepted ideas concerning the fact of claiming Irish ancestry. While proceeding to this questioning, I demonstrate how diversified the category of "people of Irish extraction" is. Consequently, I suggest that this category is significant only as regards the "Irish people at home" one (which is seen as its opposite).

First of all, "being of Irish extraction" is often associated with the idea of being "cut off" from one's territorial origins. According to genealogist amateurs whom I met in Ireland, "being of Irish extraction" would imply that the removal of Irish-born people from their homeland had been imposed rather than chosen. At the same time, it would highlight the idea of a geographic and temporal distance from their country of origin as well as the dispossession and deprivation of their land. In fact, people who self-identify as "being of Irish extraction" often consider themselves and their ancestors as "victims" of other people's political choices, claiming that other groups subjected them to land-loss.<sup>3</sup> In other

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<sup>2</sup> Yet, it did not tell us about the computing process and its criteria. One could suggest that the number of Irish Americans recorded in the US Census – i.e. forty-four million – has been inflated in order to produce this estimation.

<sup>3</sup> This claim is often analysed by the Irish population at home as a discursive process whereby migrants and their descendants tend to expiate their guilt at abandoning the

words, they developed the idea that "push" factors alone were responsible for emigration. Additionally, they use their identification as "being of Irish extraction" to affirm their discontent about shifting power differentials. As they self-identify with "people of Irish extraction", these persons also consider suffering dislocation, homesickness and up-rootedness.<sup>4</sup>

Let me provide two brief illustrations of how these thoughts are translated into narratives and behaviours. The first example is a quotation from what was said by a middle-aged American woman whom I spoke to during a genealogical meeting. "[Our ancestors] had no choice but to leave Ireland. They would have died if they hadn't migrated. You must be aware that they had been kicked out of the country." The informant further referred to the "expropriation of Irish landlords" in order to assert her opinion. Yet it is noteworthy that she does not know precisely who her Irish connection is. This uncertainty leads me to the second part of my demonstration. People of Irish descent do not hesitate to manipulate their family history as well as Irish history itself. In the event that they did not possess strong evidence concerning the reason for which their ancestors left Ireland, they would readily suggest that it happened during the Famine. "I do not know who is my Irish ancestor, but I think that he probably left Ireland in the mid-1860s. I guess it was because of the Famine." Apart from extracting this event from its chronological borders (1845-1849), another informant (a retired man living in Massachusetts, who had been looking for his roots for several years) used words that belong to the repertoire of doubt and belief. Afterward, he also respectively typified nineteenth-century Irish and British people as follows: "hungered" and "food-spoilers", suggesting that famine and emigration have been orchestrated deliberately by the latter.

I argue that these social representations not only rely on the lack of backward-looking knowledge but on a very nationalist substratum. These are the reasons why these public comprehensions should be debated. In the first place, the victimisation of Irish emigrants contradicts the idea and the concrete experience of voluntary migration. Yet, many people chose to leave Ireland because they thought that they could make a better life elsewhere (Akenson 1993, Mac Laughlin 1994). Kerby Miller (1985) stressed the need for distinguishing between voluntary "emigrants" who looked forward to a better future abroad and "exiles" who were regarded as having

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homeland. Such an analysis might be understood in relation "to the attitudes of home-based Irish towards their emigrants siblings" that Piaras MacÉinrí and Brian Lambkin (2002) described as follows: "a complex mixture of resentment, begrudgery and denial, with perhaps a touch of a suggestion of betrayal, with those who were 'really' committed to the new Irish State being prepared to stay on and stick it out in spite of hardship." It refers more precisely to the last element of this description.

<sup>4</sup> Self-identifying terms such as being "an up-rooted person" refer to the botanical lexical field. The assimilation between people and plants makes sense as regards the land metaphor by which nations are designated and reveals the ontological way whereby people usually assert their territorial identity (Bestard-Camps 2001:15).

been forced to migrate. As far as the victimisation of emigrants is concerned, the forging of collective memory – by glorifying famines, and political and rural exiles rather than other emigration forms, and by interpreting and remembering migration in terms of sacrifice, injustice, and persecution – reflects nineteenth-century nationalist ideology, whereby certain elites devoted themselves to distinguishing between the Irish and the British. This was the case of John Mitchel, a member of the *Young Irelanders* society, which was a nationalist group active in the 1840s. Advocating a peasant-led social revolution, John Mitchel promoted the idea that The Famine was intentionally engineered by the British to force the Irish out of their homeland. He wrote descriptions of the potato famine and called for the overthrow of the landlord-system and the establishment of an Irish republic, particularly in the *United Irishman* newspaper and his *Last Conquest of Ireland* book (Mitchel 1861). According to modern Irish academic historians, images about the Irish past to whose development John Mitchel contributed in the nineteenth-century, upon which some people shape their vision of history, are nothing more or less than "mythical" or "romantic" representations of the past. As interpretations, these visions do not reflect the social reality of the past. They merely translate ideologies. On the other hand, the idea of the "lost homeland" is not equally shared by people of Irish descent. For example, most of those with Protestant Irish ancestor(s) do not foster this point of view, even though they, too, self-identify as being of "Irish extraction". In fact, they would prefer to do so rather than labelling themselves as "Irish-Americans" (if they live in America) insofar as this last term is religiously connoted with Roman Catholicism (Miller 1985). Both these arguments are sufficient for demonstrating that, in fact, the category of "being of Irish extraction" creates feelings of social unity between individuals who do not form a homogeneous group. Descendants of Irish emigrants and descendants of so-called "Irish exiles" are included in this group, as well as Catholics and Protestants.

There is a second accepted idea that I wish to discuss. Belonging to the category of "being of Irish extraction" is largely based on biological evidence. According to narratives, both men and women can self-identify as being of "Irish extraction", since reference to maternal or paternal "blood" to assert one's Irishness is not a male prerogative. In fact, people "of Irish extraction" often follow a bilateral kinship system when living outside Ireland. This means that the kin of a given person is defined by tracing back descent from both parents, to the four grandparents, the eight great-grand-parents, and so on, over further generations. Given this principle, people could refer to the Irish blood that female or male ancestors had transmitted to them in order to assert their own Irishness.<sup>5</sup> In this context, "blood" is also viewed as a "natural" property whereby people may

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<sup>5</sup> Blood rhetoric directs genealogical thought. It lead some of my informants to have DNA tests done so that they could have their Irish identity proven and confirmed by scientists.

self-identify as being Irish-related. However, this so-called "Irish blood" could have been transmitted to them through fictive genealogical bonds, by way of adoption. I use this argument to contend that belonging to the category of "being of Irish extraction" is based on culture, not on biology.

Following this latter belief, Irishness is also commonly understood as a permanent property, which can only be attenuated by marriage with non Irish-related people. In this view, Irishness can never be lost. Therefore, it is conceivable that the designation of "being of Irish extraction" applies to the offspring of all migrants. The criterion of generation may be used to put forward the peculiarity of each offspring and to estimate the temporal and genealogical proximity with Ireland of all such offspring. Given the long history of Irish migration, it would not be surprising to hear someone say that he or she belongs to the seventh generation of Irish-Americans, even though family memory rarely extends beyond the third generation (Hareven 1978; Byron 1998). As for Catholic Americans descended from more recent immigrants, they would not only claim to be "of Irish extraction" but they would also indicate that they belong to the "second" or the "third generation of Irish-Americans."

Furthermore, it has become usual for people who claim to be "of Irish extraction" to declare their identity in fractional terms, since their ancestors may have married non Irish-related people. By this process, they could estimate – in a comparative way within their family and outside of it – their degree of Irishness (Nash 2002). For example, Rhonna, a 65 years old American woman whom I interviewed in Dublin, clearly expressed such a thought when saying that: "The Irish blood in my veins is through my mother. I consider myself half-Irish by blood as my grandmother, my maternal grandmother and all my maternal great-grandparents were born in Ireland. I have transmitted this heritage to my children who genetically would be considered as being one-quarter Irish." Yet, Rhonna could have defined herself as being of German descent (the mother of her father was born in Germany), or as a descendant of Danish people (her father's father grew up in Denmark). She could have given these latter origins a higher priority than she actually did. The fact that she introduced herself as "being of Irish extraction" (without denying any external influences) proves, however, that identity is also a matter of personal choice. This sounds even truer in view of the fact that two of her brothers have made different affiliation choices. Rhonna's elder brother is totally self-identified with the German/Danish sides, and her younger brother seems to have rejected his immigrant background, introducing himself as "American".

Nonetheless, I suppose that this personal choice could be influenced both by feelings of affection (Rhonna said her eldest brother feels closer to his father) and by political situations or social surroundings. Migrants and their descendants can claim membership in the group of "people of Irish extraction" as long as their dislocation is recalled throughout the generations. This process implies that people could both claim their Irish origin and their relations to the past without fear, but also keep genealogical

knowledge alive. Reginald Byron (1998:29) stressed the difficulty of this process at the time of assimilation policies. While analysing Irish feelings in contemporary America, the author stated that: "The previous generation were not especially interested in where their ancestors had come from, or when, but rather in making their lives for themselves and investing in the future through their children. There was nothing to be gained by looking back. Nonetheless, most of [them] were conscious of being of Irish ancestry." This argument is also useful in understanding the self-identification process among people of Irish descent. It could be presumed that it would probably have been more difficult in the wake of World War II for Rhonna's elder brother to self-identify with the German side.

Given the fact that "being of Irish extraction" could be a characteristic of any American, Australian, Canadian, South African, Englishman or other national who "feels" strongly connected by blood to Ireland, Irish-born persons often use discursive strategies in order to classify these people. In Ireland, the term "Yanks" is used to designate those who live in America, the word "Kiwis" to speak about those who live in New Zealand, the term "Aussies" to refer to those who reside in Australia, while they deploy the term "Plastic Paddies" to designate the descent of the Irish people who once settled in Great Britain. However, the words "Yanks", "Kiwis", "Aussies" are not strictly reserved for "people of Irish extraction" as they may include any Caucasian who lives in America, New Zealand and Australia. The term "Plastic Paddies" is different because it only refers to Irish emigrants and their descendants who live in Great Britain. "Plastic Paddy", which carries a pejorative connotation, is constructed as an opposite of "Paddy Murphy." Paddy is the diminutive of Patrick, which is probably the most common first name in Ireland, while Murphy is a very regularly occurring Irish surname. The association of these two names traditionally refers to the average Irishman. The substitution of the surname "Murphy" by the adjective "plastic" is a discursive strategy frequently used by the Irish population at home in order to underline the superficial dimension of the Irishness that so-called "people of Irish extraction" allegedly assert when living in Britain. In other words, it is nothing more or less than an assertion by Irish-born people that they alone can claim "authenticity" in terms of "being Irish." These examples demonstrate that naming processes are significant in recognizing one's identity and classifying people (Lévi-Strauss 1962). In the Irish case, it proves that names could be used to differentiate between national and trans-national identities.

In contemporary Ireland, "people of Irish extraction" may not only be seen as representing the "Irish population abroad" but also as the opposite of the "Irish population at home". This latter category is restricted to Irish-born persons (Catholics or Protestants), who live in their native country. These denominations imply that Irishness does not fit into any boundaries. It is much more a multi-located feeling that people can (choose to) activate and highlight their common past and place of origin

regardless of faith (Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Presbyterianism), language (English, French, Hindi) and residence (United States of America, Canada, Australia, India, South Africa). This definition of Irishness, which carries the connotation that the Irish nation is an extended family (Kearney 1997:5), or a network, has been upheld particularly over the last two decades. In a very emblematic way and with the backing of intellectuals, academics and media, the former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson (1990-1997), firmly supported this vision (Böss 2002). According to the philosopher Richard Kearney (1997), who also espoused this point of view, this inclusive and "generous" meaning of Irishness challenges the ethnic definition of a nation-state. This rings true because "people of Irish extraction" who are included in this "open nation" could be from different ethnic confessions. Additionally, such a view of the Irish nation also challenges the territorial definitions of the nation-state as it considers that the Irish nation is a "diasporic" nation.<sup>6</sup> This is to say that Ireland is viewed as a community that fits neither the boundaries of the Irish State nor the island's geographical demarcation.

## **2. From the nation-state to the migrant-nation: shifting ideologies**

In this section, I explain that this view of the Irish nation as an "open nation" stands in opposition to the representatives of separatist nationalism, who acted politically to unify Ireland after the Partition. I also suggest that Irish elites have fostered the idea that Ireland is diasporic so that they could break with Éamon de Valera's ideology.

In the first two decades after the Independence Treaty of 1921, Ireland's nationalist leaders established a new constitution (1937) with the aim to dissociate Ireland from its British influence and to reinforce the sovereignty of the country. The prime minister at that time, Éamon de Valera, was a key actor in the development of this new constitution. He used the island territory to assert what he understood to be the Irish nation and to act politically against British and Unionist powers. Because he postulated the pre-existence of the Irish nation bound to island territory, he established the right of Irish people to have their own independent state. "The Irish nation hereby affirms its inalienable, indefeasible, and sovereign right to choose its own form of Government, to determine its relations with other nations, and to develop its life, political, economic and cultural, in accordance with its own genius and traditions" (Article 1). On the one hand, this constitution could be seen as a legacy of the French Revolution

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<sup>6</sup> Ireland would be composed of five provinces and, according to Richard Kearney's social revisionist thesis, the fifth one (which also represents, according to the Celtic tradition, Ireland's spiritual middle) would be located abroad. Michael Böss (2002), who critically analysed this representation, mentioned that this symbol disappeared in the late 1990s and, in order to explain this new turning-point, he suggested it had been "superseded by the cruder and more tangible symbolism of the 'Celtic Tiger'" with the rising of social and cultural liberalism.

as it postulated the self-determination of the Irish nation. On the other, the underlying autochthonous character and cultural foundations of the nation seems to have been a reflection of the 19th century Germanophilism. This latter point was influenced by Johann von Herder who asserted that human groups are "the products of climate, geography, physical and biological needs" and that they are "unified by common traditions and memories and above all by language" (cited by O'Giolláin 2000:23). Both the claim of self-determination and the cultural foundation of the nation lead to the following paragraph which states that: "The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas" (Article 2). The territorial criterion seems to prevail over others in the meaning Éamon de Valera gave to the nation (belonging to the Irish Nation is determined by the island's maritime boundaries). At the same time, it determines Eamon de Valera's protectionist and intra-national policies. As he looked forward to ending Partition once and for all, he acted in favour of the preservation of the Irish language and a strongly family-based system of social values.<sup>7</sup> He also prioritised both rural and small-town values in order to consolidate the national consciousness at home and to decrease Irish emigration. Even though this Irish political leader made several broadcasts to the Irish population abroad, his politics viewed assistance to Irish people abroad as secondary. Éamon de Valera's main concerns remained the strengthening of the nation-state and, above all, the building of a self-sufficient Ireland.<sup>8</sup> He declared on February 17, 1937 that: "The aim of the Irish government is not to provide facilities for the emigration of our people to the states of the British Commonwealth or elsewhere. Its aim is to concentrate on utilizing the resources of this country and so improving the conditions of life here that our people will not have to emigrate, but will be able to find a livelihood in our country" (quoted by Delaney 1998:30).

Nonetheless, these exaltations of the countryside and of Catholic Irish families did not prevent people from leaving Ireland. Quite the reverse. Emigration was still current during the 1930s and 1940s, even though scholars have shown that the patterns of this migration radically differed compared with the past. The restrictive measures that had been adopted in the 1920s by the United States in matters of immigration, particularly, made people move more readily towards Britain, where an increasing demand for labour existed. According to Terence Brown (1985) and Enda Delaney (1998), emigration was something that was beneficial to Irish internal policies, since it prevented social conflicts in Ireland at a time when the country was facing general austerity. This is probably the reason why the Irish government provided a state-controlled emigration policy, rather than prohibiting people to migrate in the early

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<sup>7</sup> This policy, which fell within the continuity of Douglas Hyde's appeal to "deanglicise" Ireland, indicates how organicist Eamon de Valera's definition of the nation was.

<sup>8</sup> Enda Delaney (1998) argued that the idea of encouraging indigenous industry in order to solve the problem of emigration had been expressed previously by Daniel O'Connell in the 1830s, Charles Stewart Parnell in the 1890s and Patrick Pearse in the 1910s.

1940s. During the post-war years, Irish-born persons continued to travel to Britain in the search for employment. In 1948, Éamon Valera's party lost the election as a result of the rising emigration and political protests. Subsequently, a new government came into power and founded the *Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems*. This Commission was in charge of examining social attitudes towards migration and providing proposals to substantially decrease emigration, such as the ban on young female migration. In 1956, representatives of the Commission pointed out that the poor conditions of life in rural areas and a high unemployment rate had made emigration more popular, and that people saw it as something that they could undertake without trepidation (Brown 1985).<sup>9</sup> At the same time, this way of interpreting emigration contributed to the devaluation of the idea of a self-sufficient Irish nation and future nationalist projects.

It seems noteworthy that, in the mid-1950s, not only the Irish politicians questioned the ways being utilised to reduce Irish emigration, but also the right of the Irish emigrants and their descendants to be part of the Irish nation. In 1956, the Citizenship Act held that there should be no more doubts that these people still belonged to Ireland as an "imagined community".<sup>10</sup> This Act is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it makes the identity of Irish people abroad a national and institutional concern. Secondly, the definition of "Irishness" and the manners of approaching this identity in an institutionalised way fall within the scope of Irish politics by the means of this Act. The Citizenship Act is still used today by people who claim to be "of Irish extraction" if they wish to affirm a kind of national allegiance to their homeland, or to gain access to the European Community as workers, since Ireland has been a member since 1973. This is the case with Rhonna, who established her Irish citizenship through her maternal grandmother and, more surprisingly, with her husband who also obtained his citizenship through marriage.<sup>11</sup> Rhonna's testimony not only stresses the difference between accessing Irish citizenship and "being of Irish extraction", but also reveals that the granting of Irish citizenship bears only a symbolic meaning for her. Because Rhonna does not live in Ireland anymore, her Irish citizenship does not provide her the right to vote within the Republic of Ireland. Unlike people who choose to become Irish residents, she has not been recognized as civically incorporated within the

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<sup>9</sup> However, Irish-born people still consider that emigration is a betrayal.

<sup>10</sup> Benedict Anderson (1992) coined this expression to explain how nations have been created by men who, through a process of imagination, express a feeling of solidarity, a sense of togetherness often based on common interpretations of the past.

<sup>11</sup> This disposal related to the granting of Irish citizenship through marriage has experienced several changes since 1956. Up to the mid 1980s, it applied only to women who married an Irish man. Conversely, non-Irish men who married Irish-related women had to first become naturalized before claiming citizenship. In 1986, it became possible for men to obtain Irish citizenship otherwise than by naturalisation. This amendment will cease to have effect in November 2005.

Irish State. As Irish citizens abroad, Rhonna and her husband are not subject to specific rights and obligations within Ireland.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that the Citizenship Act has created social and civic inequalities among those who are legally Irish people. Therefore, it further challenges the concept of "inclusiveness" that elites and politicians have developed in late twentieth-century Ireland.

What does "inclusiveness" mean in this context and why is it so attractive to Irish politicians? At a time of Europeanisation and globalisation and when reunification of Ireland and Northern Ireland is out of fashion, well-known authors and commentators, such as Kearney (1997) and O'Toole (1998), have argued that people do not need to live in Ireland anymore to "feel" Irish" and to consider that Ireland is their "homeland". From this point of view, the fact that someone "of Irish extraction" (who is not born in Ireland and who has never lived in that country) may be considered an Irish citizen if Irish ancestry over a three-generation period can be certified, gives a kind of substance to their discourse. Richard Kearney (1997) and Fintan O'Toole (1998) also stated that Irishness is a generous concept, and that it is something that people abroad have appropriated, interpreted and transformed through time. They theorised emigration in terms of the expression of Irish culture, and they developed the idea that dislocation has always been "natural" to the Irish population. In other words, instead of viewing Ireland as a nation-state and as a country with fixed territorial boundaries, they imagined it as an "ethnoscape"<sup>13</sup> that has traditionally been subject to human fluidity and cross-bordering. O'Toole (1998:4-5) expressed the concept in these words: "The Lie of the land is that there is a place called 'Ireland' inhabited by the Irish people, a place with a history, a culture, a society. Yet the central fact of that history is that, over 150 years, much of it has happened elsewhere, in Chicago and Coventry, in Boston and Birmingham [...]. The central fact of that culture is that it knows no borders. The central fact of that society is that it is porous and diffuse." In his essay, the columnist of the *Irish Times* and the *Guardian* newspapers referred to contemporary festivals (the Saint Patrick's Day Parade in New York) and cinematographic productions (*The Quiet Man* that John Ford directed in 1952) in order to corroborate his opinion that Ireland is trans-national and that "Irishness" transcends the Irish nation-state.

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<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that, unlike Poles or Italians, for example, Irish-born citizens also lose the right to vote once they migrate.

<sup>13</sup> I refer to the way Arjun Appadurai (1991:192) defined this word: "By *ethnoscape*, I mean the landscape of persons who make up the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest-workers, or other moving groups and persons." The author also suggested that existing stable communities and networks of kinship, friendship, work, and leisure are "everywhere shot through with the wool of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the reality of having to move and the fantasies of wanting to move".

The arguments of Fintan O'Toole and Richard Kearney have undergone criticism. I have already mentioned the fact that there exist social inequities among people who gain access to Irish citizenship, which are overshadowed by the ideology these authors have defended. In the same way, it is noteworthy that new immigrants and refugees have no political rights within the Republic or have only lesser rights. Catherine Piola (1998), who covered this issue, also mentioned existing xenophobic attitudes towards newly arrived immigrants (either Irish-related or not) in the 1990s. She referred to the entrance of the *Immigration Control Platform* (a militant group which preaches a strictly Irish national identity) onto the Irish political scene, in order to question the so-called "openness" of the Irish nation. As for Jim Mac Laughlin (1994), he regretted that the concept of migrant-nation has prevented scholars from analysing the structural reasons for emigration, while interpreting the migration as a "natural" practice whereby Irish people express their identity. More recently, Piaras MacÉinrí and Brian Lambkin (2002) have pointed out that people in Ireland are not always supportive of this new ideology, even though a few Irish politicians have shown their willingness to use and manipulate the concept of a trans-national and inclusive Ireland.

For example, in February 1995, Mary Robinson addressed the Houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament). Her discourse was a convincing way of testifying to the progress of this migrant-nation ideology, and the building of a postmodern and post-national identity within late twentieth-century Ireland. At the time she called for "cherishing the Irish Diaspora" she stated that "Irishness is not simply territorial". By doing so, Mary Robinson did more than proceed to the reification of Irish emigration. Even though the history of the Irish people differs significantly from the history of the Israelites and the Jewish people, to whom the word "Diaspora" traditionally applies, she appropriated this concept to refer both to the scattering of Irish culture and the existing network of Irish people all around the world. Undermining Éamon de Valera's interpretation of who belonged in and to Ireland, Mary Robinson also transformed the migratory history of Irish men and women abroad into a "treasure of [Irish] society". This means that emigration has become a part of Ireland's heritage that the government itself can transform into an asset. This also indicates that the past could be used to develop the future economy of Ireland. In 1998, the legal recognition of the bonds that link Ireland to its populations abroad has become even more institutionalised with the insertion of an amendment to Article 2 of the Irish Constitution: "It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish Nation. That is also the entitlement of all persons otherwise qualified in accordance with law to be citizens of Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage." This amendment indicates the recognition of emigrants and suggests the possibility for Ireland to act upon them.

Consequently, people who claim to be "of Irish extraction" have become part of the national discourse for advancing the peace process, overwhelming militant republicanism in Northern Ireland, and boosting the Irish economy. In other words, the so-called "Diaspora" has been used in contemporary Ireland in order to call the social order into question and to gather social identities.

### **3. The instrumentalization of the Diaspora: the *Irish Genealogical Project***

In this section I provide an illustration of this political instrumentalization by exploring the promotion of roots-tourism in Ireland. Roots-tourism (which I include within commuting and seasonal forms of travelling rather than within reverse-migration patterns) is practiced by holidaymakers who choose to travel to Ireland in order to trace their roots and meet distant or close relatives.

The promotion of roots-tourism started in the mid 1980s. At that time, Ireland reflected jointly with Northern Ireland on a way to create a "New Ireland", building confidence measures on a cross-border basis.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Ireland faced a rise in unemployment and it experienced a new wave of emigration (King & Shuttleworth 1988). The development of the tertiary activity sector appeared to Irish politicians to be a way of reversing this situation (Gillmor 1994). They believed that they could use the feelings of people "of Irish extraction" – such as up-rootedness and homesickness – in the service of their national economy, and that they could use genealogy to support tourism expansion. In this process, political elites developed what has been called since then the "roots-tourism" industry, being aware that genealogy had recently gained considerable popularity in Western countries and more precisely in the United States of America. In 1987, they founded the *Irish Genealogical Project (IGP)* and subsequently established a company in charge of managing and marketing it.<sup>15</sup>

With the cumulative objectives of prompting people "of Irish extraction" to visit their motherland and drawing financial benefit from this population, organizers and sponsors entered a phase of active promotion after the government (1985:27) established that: "... over 50 million people living abroad [...] are of Irish descent. This is a vast and well-disposed potential reservoir business in what might be termed heritage tourism. It needs concentrated efforts to develop it. While people of Irish descent have some predisposition to visit Ireland, experience has shown

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<sup>14</sup> *New Ireland Forum Report*, 1984, Dublin, The Stationary Office.

<sup>15</sup> Since that time, other countries, such as Germany, have undertaken the same initiative, while embracing the European Community "Routes to the Roots" project.

that it requires extensive marketing efforts to convert this interest into actual holidays here."<sup>16</sup>

Since that time, several national and international institutions, such as *Bord Fáilte*, have supported the *IGP*. The National Tourism Development Authority has done research in North America to know what people "want[ed] to see and hear, which stories and pictures are acceptable and saleable and which are not" (Byron 1998:34). While promoting the idea that Ireland is a place where people can "escape the pressures of modernity" and encounter the "authenticity of the pre-modern" world (O'Connor 1993:76), *Bord Fáilte* has also published papers and advertising pamphlets to attract the attention of the Irish populations abroad who are seeking for their roots. These publications include an Irish genealogy handbook, the activity programmes of several Irish genealogical societies, abstracts of the history of Irish family names and classified ads originating from either professional genealogists or commercial firms, which specialise in the manufacturing and sale of coats-of-arms. For its part, the National Post Office *An Post* launched the "Write and Invite Campaign" to promote Ireland's hospitality abroad by asking the Irish population at home to send postcards to distant relatives living in North America, in Australia, or in New Zealand. One might question the way such hospitality really applies to migrants (either permanent or temporary ones, either Irish-related or not), but the fact is that this image (which is combined with the mediation of the ideology of Ireland as a postmodern and migrant-nation) has produced some results. Statistics that *Bord Fáilte*<sup>17</sup> provided in 1994 demonstrated that more and more people were visiting Ireland in order to trace back their family history and to define their identities. According to these data, roots-tourism related to 39,000 persons in 1989, 58,000 in 1993, and 117,000 "people of Irish extraction" were expected for the year 2000. Other figures completed this information by drawing the profile of the average roots-tourist. He/she is aged under 45 and comes to Ireland with his/her spouse. He/she lives in North America (57%); he/she visits Ireland during the summer period (47%) and stays there (i.e. in Dublin and in the south-western part of Ireland) no more than 9 days (51%). These crude figures reveal both the framing of travelling and leisure activities and the categorisation of tourist types into different groups. People who claim to be "of Irish extraction" and who visit Ireland for genealogical purposes definitively constitute one of these categories (even though they form a minority group), just as, for example, golfers or archaeological-sites lovers do.

Within the framework of the *IGP*, the *Foras Áiseanna Saothair* (Ireland's national training and employment authority) has provided

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<sup>16</sup> The Government of Ireland. 1985. *White Paper on Tourism Policy*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

<sup>17</sup> Bord Fáilte. 1994. *Perspectives on Irish Tourism Activities 1989-1993*. Dublin: Bord Fáilte Publication.

special training programmes aimed at the unemployed. Thousands of young people have been working as data capture trainees. Their job consists of capturing biographical data on computers, which can then be consulted by people who claim to be "of Irish extraction".<sup>18</sup> These data prove that *IGP* is not only a means of transforming "people of Irish extraction" into roots-tourists but is also a way of creating jobs and new skills within the Republic of Ireland.<sup>19</sup> Simultaneously, this demonstrates that the Irish population abroad has become a prime target for stimulating and diversifying the national economy of Ireland. With the *International Fund for Ireland (IFFI)*, which has continually supported the *IGP*, this instrumentalization of the Irish population abroad achieves a broader dimension. The aim of the *IFFI*, which defines itself as an independent organisation, is to promote economic and social advancement and to encourage a constructive dialogue between Unionists and Nationalists through the establishment of a socio-economical partnership.<sup>20</sup> Among other projects, the *IFFI* prompts the Irish of the Republic to work closely together with Northern Ireland inhabitants and it transforms Irish and Northern Irish people into co-ordinators of joint projects, such as the promotion of roots-tourism and the building of Heritage Centres on the whole island. The *IFFI* favours their reconciliation in this way.

The organisation raises funds from international donors. Apart from donations by the European Community, other funds are provided by non-European countries such as the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, that is, countries that have experienced a great inflow of Irish migrants over a prolonged period. Any of these financial contributions could be seen as tributes that Irish people abroad pay to their country of origin. They are also gifts made in return for their own achievements and those of their kinfolk since they established themselves outside their homeland. In the global *IFFI* and *IGP* framework, these tributes are repaid through a number of accomplishments that give the European Community, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand concrete results. These include the promotion of the peace process on the whole island (a major requirement among members of the European Community), the strengthening of the Irish economy, as well as the case of shaping individual and collective identities through locating personal "roots" and family origins. This latter point is especially noteworthy at a time when globalisation makes "Irishness" less easy to define in terms of territorial ascription. In fact, the value that people place on their

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<sup>18</sup> Such information is originally recorded largely in church and civil records and in census returns.

<sup>19</sup> Heritage Keeper positions have also been created over the last two decades, as part of the *IGP*. Their recruitment, although not on a massive scale, is another way to testify that the *IGP* has economic scope.

<sup>20</sup> This organisation was set up soon after the passing of the Hillsborough Agreement (1985); this Act gave the Republic of Ireland a consultative role in the governing of Northern Ireland and abolished the idea of reunification.

kin, their genealogies and their homeland indicates that the Irish nation is still representing a "rooted-place" for personal identities and collective memories. This becomes evident through different forms of social practices that *Bord Fáilte* promoted and supported during the 1990s: visits to commemorative places and museums that specialize in the performing of Irish history, clan gatherings where people celebrate their supposed kinship ties as well as the so-called "Celtic heritage" (Legrand 2002). These events, which *Bord Fáilte* ranks among passive holidaymaker pursuits, provide these people with a sense of place, history and belonging, that is to say, a more precise sense of who they are. As for the Irish people at home, whom these roots-tourists meet and encounter while visiting Ireland, they "become inscribed within tourist expectations" (O'Connor 1999:73). The hope is that they fulfil the needs of people of Irish extraction, especially in the case of roots-tourists, facilitating both access to genealogical data and the strengthening of their mutual kinship-ties. It is also hoped that the hosts correspond with the representations of Irish rural people drawn by romantic authors and past nationalist leaders. In other words, Irish natives have also been expected to play the role of icons of authenticity. Being directly involved in the "touristifying" of their country and landscapes, the Irish people at home represent for these roots-tourists key actors in the shaping of individual identities, while they can also express their disapproval regarding the expectations of their visitors of Irish extraction. Although genealogical tourism is viewed by Irish politics as a means for expanding the Irish national economy and strengthening the peace process on the whole island, it represents, particularly, an original social framework whereby national and trans-national identities can be confronted.

### **Conclusion**

This article has suggested that Ireland has been viewed as an open nation by the media and politicians since the late 1980s. This representation is translated into several social practices. The ideas of welcoming and "cherishing the Irish Diaspora" held by former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson, and the fact that descendants of Irish emigrants self-identify as "being of Irish extraction" are part of these practices. The inclusion of the Irish populations abroad within the Irish nation, by the means of the granting Irish Citizenship, is another way of affirming this ideology. However, the Irish Citizenship Act also promotes social inequities (some citizens are allowed to vote, other are not) and contemporary political debates (about refugees' rights) indicate that Ireland's openness could rightly be called into question.

In this paper I also demonstrate that representing Ireland as a "diasporic" nation has been useful to Irish politicians, since it breaks with former nationalist ideologies. With the ending of Éamon de Valera's rule, Ireland has forged new network alliances worldwide and experienced a new power balance. Since that time, media and politicians have felt the

need not only to represent migration and human cross-bordering as an Irish tradition but also to proclaim publicly Ireland's loyalty to "people of Irish extraction". Through this reasoning, they have been able to make current policy choices, such as the defence of the peace process and the boosting of the Irish economy. As regard the Irish political agenda – and given the long history of Irish emigration – I have suggested that the expansion of the Irish economy partly relies on a new kind of migration: roots-tourism.

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## NACIJA, MIGRACIJA I IDENTITETI KRAJEM 20. STOLJEĆA U IRSKOJ

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### SAŽETAK

Od kraja osamdesetih godina 20. stoljeća mediji i političari su definirali Irsku kao "otvorenu naciju". Ta se predodžba odražava u nekoliko društvenih praksi. To su, primjerice, ideje bivše irske predsjednice Mary Robinson da se irskoj dijaspori izrazi dobrodošlica u zemlji te da se njeguje. Činjenica da se potomci irskih emigranata sami identificiraju kao "ljudi irskoga podrijetla" također je dio tih praksi. Davanjem irskoga državljanstva irskim populacijama koje žive u inozemstvu, dakle njihovo uključivanje u irsku naciju, potvrđuje ideologiju irske nacije kao otvorene nacije. Međutim, Akt o irskome državljanstvu potiče i neke društvene nejednakosti (neki državljani smiju, a neki ne smiju glasati) i političke rasprave (o pravima izbjeglica), čime se navodna irska otvorenost može dovesti u pitanje. Autorica je pokazala da je predočivanje Irske kao "iseljeničke" nacije bilo korisno irskim političarima jer je dokinulo dotadašnje nacionalističke ideologije. Nakon vladavine Éamona de Valere Irska je u cijelome svijetu izgradila saveze i osigurala novu ravnotežu snaga. Od tada su mediji i političari osjetili potrebu da ne samo migraciju i općenito mobilnost predoče kao irsku tradiciju nego i da javno proglase lojalnost Irske "ljudima irskoga podrijetla". S takvim tumačenjima utjecali su na trenutne događaje, primjerice na mirovni proces, kao i na poticanje irskog gospodarstva. Autorica tvrdi da je do procvata irskog gospodarstva djelomično došlo zbog novog oblika migracije - turista koji tragaju za svojim korijenima.

Ključne riječi: irski identitet, irski nacionalizam, migrantska nacija, turizam u potrazi za korijenima