Introduction

The past decade has been a time of significant transformation in Irish society. One of the most notable catalysts of change has been the recent and rapid shift from being a country of emigration to one of immigration, inaugurating an extraordinary process of ethnic diversification within what has long been considered a ‘monocultural’ society. Migration has thus served as an important measure as well as driver of change, reflecting Ireland’s immersion in the global arena and initiating pervasive changes, socially and institutionally.

Scholarship concerning such issues as identity, diversity and social change in Ireland has yet to catch up with these changes, and until very recently, has been limited primarily to the areas of ethno-nationalism and racism. Work on ethno-national identity has proven unduly narrow as a result of the legacy of ‘Orthodox nationalist scholarship’ and a preoccupation with the conflict in Northern Ireland. The former’s concern with nation-building and constructions of a unified, homogeneous ‘Irish people’ (Connelly 2003: 174) and the latter’s exclusive focus on Catholic-Protestant relations have rendered other minority ethnic communities virtually invisible in national political and intellectual landscapes (Hainsworth 1998, Feldman 2003). Research is increasingly addressing the meanings of Irishness (Murphy 1991, O’Toole 1998, Graham 2001) and some specific aspects of identity (Fagan 1995, Kockel 1995, Cronin 1999), but this has been predominantly quantitative in nature, with little in-depth qualitative exploration of how people see and understand themselves in relation to gender, age, class, sexuality, locality, art and so on.

Attention to minority ethnic communities in Ireland has evolved largely under the rubrics of racism and immigration. A notable amount of research has been devoted to a wide range of policy issues relating to Travellers and refugees and asylum seekers, and recent scholarship has centred primarily upon the dynamics and deepening of social and institutional racism in Ireland (Hainsworth 1998, Fanning 2002, Lentin and McVeigh 2002, Garner 2004), with a substantial amount of work based on attitudinal surveys and social psychological analyses (MacGreil 1996, MacLaughlin and O’Connell 2000, Garner and White 2002).
The sustained focus on racism, academically and with respect to activism, has been critically important; however, there are limitations to its capacity to capture the complex transformations currently taking place. The resulting ghettoisation of these issues and communities of interest within what is often constructed as ‘special’ policy areas (or even as ‘social problems’) and ‘target groups’ removes them from wider considerations of social and economic development of Irish society as a whole. It also contributes to the reification of ‘ethnic-Others’ and ‘aliens’ as perpetual outsiders of the ‘legitimate’ (although now multi-ethnic) populace (Feldman et al., 2005). On the ground, it contributes to burnout among the victims of racism as a result of being over-researched and generates backlash among segments of society stigmatised as racist.

Much criticism of this imbalance has been advanced by race critical scholars and in ‘critical white studies’. They argue that it has led to the de-racialisation of majority ethnic identities and over-racialisation of ‘visible’ ethnic minorities, reinforcing a simplistic black/white dualism, and essentialising Others’ alterity (Brah 1996, Frankenberg 1999, Nayak 2003). This in turn circumvents crucial opportunities to excavate the various forms of otherness within white communities – the ‘crisis in the dominant forms of Anglo-ethnicity’ (Brah 1996: 2) – and develop greater insights into the foundations of all racial and cultural positionings (Frankenberg 1999). As such, this imbalance has generated ‘the striking contradiction... that we now seem to know far less about the racialised identities of the ethnic majority... who they are in the present post-imperial moment...and who they may yet “become”’ (Nayak 2003: 139). Increasingly, communities are no longer formed over successive generations and based on traditional forms of work (Nayak 2003), and it is more common for ‘neighbours’ to be ‘strangers’ from distant places, and ‘security’ to be based on the priorities of transnational corporations (Papastergiadis 2000) or government-led policies of border control. It is in this interface between people and their own crises of existence and the regimes managing their lives, that private and public notions of racial and ethnic identity are staked out and negotiated. It is here that we confront, contest and collude in, publicly calibrated notions of who we are in racial or ethnic terms.

(Knowles 2003: 46)

The work underpinning this chapter moves beyond essentialising constructions of white-Irish-racist and the Immigrant-as-always/only-negative projection of Self and Nation. It draws upon scholarship emphasising the exploration of belonging in the increasingly fluid and multiple constitutions of ethno-national identities (Castles and Davidson 2000, Hedetoft and Hjort 2002, Christiansen and Hedetoft 2004), particularly in the local contexts of everyday life. Thompson et al. argue, for example, that much of the construction of ideas of national identity takes place at local level, as people engage in drawing boundaries – real and symbolic – around their particular communities. These everyday conceptualisations of identity are far removed from the ‘purified’ and often stereotyped versions which eventually come to form part of more explicitly nationalist ideologies... The local tells about the production of the nation as a public, about the project of producing the ‘people’.

(1999: 54)
Through the analysis of three majority ethnic Irish women’s life narratives, this chapter examines how self-construction is ‘implicated in the constitution of the racialised social orders in which individual lives are cast’ (Knowles 2003: 47). It employs the conceptual resources provided by Brah’s (1996) notion of ‘diaspora space’ – the common, intersecting fields of engagement between indigenes and migrants – to gain greater insight into the mutually transforming border crossings and cultural translations, displacements and deterritorialisations endemic to migration (Papastergiadis 2000).

Constituting Self and Other in the Diaspora Nation: Life Narratives and Identity Work

For Brah, diaspora space is the nexus constituted by the confluence of journeys and narratives re-produced through individual and collective re-memory, which are re-lived through multiple modalities of gender, race, class, language and generation, among different diasporic communities relationally positioned among multiple others (Brah 1996: 183–184). In this sense, Ireland is the ultimate ‘diaspora nation’ so to speak, in terms of the extent to which fluidity and movement of people are defining features of the nation, from the early arrival of Vikings and Normans (the latter known for becoming ‘more Irish than the Irish themselves’) to the unprecedented increase in immigration during the past decade.

In the time between this legend past and extraordinary present, the country’s national story has been punctuated by the multiple modes and machinations of colonialism (Kiberd 1996, Lloyd 1999, Howe 2000, Graham 2001) and a pervasive entanglement and pre-occupation with emigration – both for those who stayed and those who left (Hickman 2002, Gray 2004). Irish collective memory is thus underpinned by the trauma and loss as well as opportunities and successes brought about through these multiple migrations, both forced and otherwise (Gray 2002; 2004). The constructions of national identity are thus peppered with contestations, reinventions and reconfigurations of Irishness and debates about authenticity, recognition, acceptance and so on. ‘Post-nationalist’ scholarship and the recent advent of Irish diaspora studies are foregrounding the multiple identities and positionalities of an inherently diverse populace – comprised of people living/not living, born/not born, citizens/non-citizens on the island – within and against the mythic script of an imagined, homogenous national community.

Within the national story, the scripts of racialised/ethnic identities are especially contradictory. Irish people have been both the targets of invasion as well as participating agents of oppression within the apparatus of British colonial administration, but also as religious missionaries and teachers who built their lives and livelihoods across the developing world. Irish people have also been both victims and perpetrators of racism in the constitution of complex racial hierarchies in destination countries, the dynamics of which have been ‘repatriated’ and ultimately reproduced in the project of nation building following independence, particularly with respect to Travellers, Black Irish, Jews and Northern Protestants.
(McVeigh 1992, Ignatiev 1995, Rolston and Shannon 2000, Lentin and McVeigh 2002). Irish communities, diasporas and identities thus constitute powerful heuristic resources for conceptualising these dynamics beyond racialised binaries of black and white (Mac an Ghaill 2002).

Mac an Ghaill (2002: 100) observes that Ireland ‘seems to have found it relatively easy to move from a closed to an open, global economy, while maintaining a closed society’, one which is characterised by the ‘normalisation and regulation of...a new racialised common sense’. But it is now a society that is experiencing massive change from within – from new residents, new communities who are transforming the country through their home-making and civic habitation (Feldman et al. 2005). The study of diaspora space in Ireland as conceptualised by Brah (1996) – including both immigrant and emigrant diasporas – promises fresh insights into ‘Irishness’, the Irish ‘people’/‘nation’, along with the dynamics of racialisation and multiple forms of racial exclusion.

It has long been argued that narrative is the primary form through which human experience is made meaningful, and increasingly is seen as the foundation upon which self-identity is achieved and expressed (Polkinghorne 1988, Holloway and Jefferson 2000, Hinchman and Hinchman 2001, Reissman 2003). Through her examinations of the relationships between personal biographies, the invented collective text of ethnicity and the process of ‘race’-making, Knowles argues that, when people make themselves the subjects of their own biographies, they simultaneously create the racialised social orders through which their own lives are cast (Knowles 2003). Life stories, ‘critical moments’ and other forms of identity narratives are ultimately important ‘sites’ for analysing ‘the relations between theory and lived experiences of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ (Gunaratnam 2003: 110).

Yet despite this importance of narrative, the difficulties in getting people to reflect and talk (in the contexts of an interview) about who they are and how they see themselves in the world are legendary and instructive. In the research discussed here, outside of highly politicised contexts or the use of directive probes, rarely did people articulate their ‘identities’ per se, at least using the language that academics use or would like them to use. Beyond some common stereotypes (e.g. Irish people characterised as witty, drinkers, outgoing etc.), people seemed rarely able to say what ‘being Irish’ meant for them personally or in their daily lives.

The goal in relation to the present analysis was to work with the texts and tellings of self-understanding in the ways interviewees told them, to then ‘sew’ together patchworks of identity narratives and tales of not/belonging to re-present the ‘psychic maps’ according to which the Other is navigated and scripted. The interview transcripts were coded according to Brah’s (1996) four modalities of difference, which created a valuable conceptual and methodological framework for this analysis, including the following:

**Experience:** symbolic and narrative construction in struggles over material conditions and meanings.

**Social relations:** contexts of dialogic constitution through systematic relations mediated by institutional discourses and practices.
subjectivity: self-construal, the site of self-in-the-world sense making.

identity: manifestation of subjectivity as coherent, continuous, stable, having an inherent core.

Thus while interviewees might not have talked distinctly about ‘identity’ writ large, it was still possible to map and analyse key experiences, interactions and processes that form the basis for how they see themselves and construct Others.

Self-Making and ‘Race’-Making: Three Irish Cases

This section draws from research undertaken as part of a project, Changing Irish Identities, which examines the impacts of global, regional, institutional and everyday life influences on how people construct and act upon their identities in contemporary Ireland. While the scope of the project precluded completely open-ended biographical methods, the interviews were as participant-led as possible in terms of taking direction from their narratives for the purposes of probing in greater depth the issues they raised (and prompting about issues that were conspicuously absent). Each of the three vignettes discussed here are constructed through narrative articulations reflecting Brah’s four modalities as they relate to the three women’s orientations towards immigration and increasing ethnic diversification in Irish society.

Mary

Mary (forty-eight years) began by talking about how her family owned a local shop and what it was like growing up in that environment. She recalled someone likening the shop to a ‘community centre’: it was a scene both of entertainment and intimacy, particularly during hard times for local customers. As a result, their lives were very public and their home was ‘chaotic’. But while it was clean, it did not have all the ‘niceties of the little sitting room in the front’ like the other homes, which she prized and for which the community was known. Because of this, Mary reported feeling quite different from the rest of the community, even ‘ashamed’ at the time, and attributes to this her longstanding ‘affinity for underdogs’, including members of the Traveller community, children who are considered ‘bold’ and so on (as well as her chosen career of teaching in these various contexts). She observes: ‘I am a great believer that you…come into this world and you meet with people from who you have something to learn and they have something to learn from you’.

When asked a question about whether she would ever consider relocating, she articulated a depiction of Irish identity that is unique in its strength and depth of insight among the entire sample of fifty people from that area. Mary noted that her sister had emigrated but that she could not, stating emphatically that

I love Ireland, I have to tell you I am a dyed in the wool Irish and I absolutely love it and I love everything about Ireland, I love even the fact that we are so insincere at times, and the way we’re sentimental, but we would walk across you if we needed to, you know, all these things.
She later elaborates, when discussing Ireland being part of the EU and its implications for having a European identity, by saying:

I tell you they say...you could go down to the depths of hell and you can pull out an Irish man and open his heart and you would find his heart is a lamb. So if they were doing something that we didn’t particularly like in Ireland, I would say we would drop our European mantle and I could probably do that very easily.

When asked more specifically about increasing ethnic diversity and being part of Irish society, Mary noted broadly the shift from great poverty in her teenage years in the 1970s, to better times in the 1980s and the incredible boom of the 1990s, although it did not affect her very much directly. She was very involved with migrant solidarity and awareness-raising work, and believes that ‘these are very exciting times for Ireland and a big change’. Observing that the boom ‘brought out a bit of the greediness and corruptness and begrudgery that might be there’ along with the cliquishness common to Irish people, she states that ‘There is a need for generosity and acceptance. There is great generosity in the Irish, although it’s not showing itself at the moment’. She feels that awareness raising and welcoming are important: ‘I think it will be very good. I hate this theory that my sister-in-law says that we should look after our own first, because we didn’t look after our own’.

Sara

Sara (fifty-five years) began her story by saying she is from a ‘dysfunctional family’ and was reared in an orphanage after her mother was institutionalised. She spoke of getting a job in the civil service and also receiving her qualifications in community development and social justice issues, giving her a language with which to be critical. Eventually she left an abusive marriage. She has a diverse group of friends and affinity groups, particularly ‘non-conformists’, ‘outsiders here who aren’t the mommies staying home minding the kids…’, an array of ‘characters’, ‘from loonies to intellectuals’. An outgrowth of her tumultuous life history is that she is a uniquely enterprising woman and free spirit: ‘I always had questions…I have to question everything ‘cause that’s my social referral. I thought I was dead normal. But seeing me come from an institution, now that I’ve learnt [that]…I’ve no role so I’ve no base…’ – in other words, there was nothing passed down from her mother about how things are, how to know who you are, and she has nothing to pass on to her son as a result.

The ways in which this sense of rootlessness shapes her sense of national identity emerged when probed about what it means to ‘feel Irish’:

Sara: Well I suppose being brought up in an institution, I wouldn’t have as strong nationalistic outlook as other people but I was very limited. I mean you could count how many black men were living in Dublin when I was growing up, you know, that rare. The most you’d see would be Italians in chippers and Chinese in Chinese [take-aways]. There was no system of all these other cultures. I would still have difficulty, lovely people but I would have difficulty in locating them as Irish. I mean when you hear, what’s that footballer…that did the anti-racism thing and said I’m Irish. You know he’s black…
2nd woman in the room: Like Samantha Mumba⁵. You’re looking at her and you think ‘American, American’ and then she opens up her mouth and you’re like ‘no, Dublin’.

TOK: So you don’t think those people are Irish or you just have trouble –
Sara: It’s culture shock. Yeah it’s a culture shock is what it is...

While Sara has a strong sense of social justice and critique of power relations stemming from her rebelliousness and community development training it is limited, however, when it comes to new immigrant communities. On the one hand she talks in depth about her concern regarding the exploitation of and lack of protection for migrant workers (and recalls how Irish workers were exploited in the same fashion), and she laments the mé féin [‘me myself’] syndrome. She discusses her memories of what she described as the dark years of emigration, the representations of impoverished Africans from the Black Babies campaign⁶, and how this negative image was transferred to her encounters with the foreign doctors and nurses in the Health Service, ‘you know telling me what to do’. This then carries over towards recent immigrants, even though she knows that ‘refugee doesn’t mean poverty’, but she cannot help being resentful if someone

is here one day and has a Mercedes and I have a Punto – it’s the same thing with jobs – a Black taxi driver – how’d he get that job when so many can’t get work?…Logically, I’d argue as much for the other person, but me heart because I know the people in [the town] that’s unemployed. All the building going on in town, there’s absolutely no [town] people either at the top or the bottom…Down on the quays, they’re all Latvians.

These contradictions are reflected in Sara’s description of what an Irish ‘ethos’ would entail, which reflects a common tendency to link changes affecting Irish people and society with in-migration:

To understand our culture, our history, our love of people. For me the experience of being Irish is being inclusive of people – everyone, you know, characters are as important as the hierarchy, for the want of a better word. There’s no place now, conformity is the name of the game…it’s a culture shock for me to see all these little yuppies going around with their briefcase, same hair, same coat…I’ve no problem with change and change is good. Now I was trying to figure this out because there’s a big argument on Joe Duffy⁷ about the migrant workers coming in…but what’s happened in my job and what I can witness in the community is, as the song, said the Celtic Tiger never reached us and now, suddenly, if you go down for rent allowance you might be the only white person there. Everyone else is Black…

In a final twist, during a discussion of the Troubles in the North at the end of the interview, she reports that,

See I didn’t tell you Nelson Mandella and Martin Luther King would have been my visionaries. So I mean it was followed very shortly, well you know coming from Martin Luther King, so you would have equated with the blacks very quickly…at least that together people can get it.

The interview ends with her stating (in response to a question about world events that changed her life) that it was the release of Mandela which gave her the confidence to go into community work.
Liz

Liz (thirty years) comes from a close family and has a strong sense of her local community. She sees being ‘honest’, ‘helpful’ and ‘true to herself’ as some of the most important things about her: ‘I suppose if I’m not comfortable with myself other people wouldn’t be either, wouldn’t be comfortable with me...’ Sport, especially football, is important at many levels, and football fans are a group that she most closely identifies with:

Watching a football match in a pub and then you know talking about it afterwards like. I can actually sit there and talk about the football match amongst other fellas. I’d know what I’m talking about. I wouldn’t be just saying it’s good or bad. I’d know the players you know...

And, although fitting in holds great importance for her, she is also sensitive to the circumstances in which people operate, their different experiences (whether class differences reflected in occupational choices or the differences between people from urban and rural communities) rather than inherent traits that make people ‘different’.

Despite her preoccupation with belonging, Liz’s boundaries with regard to ethno-national identity are rather fluid:

Just because I live in Ireland... there’s nothing mad Irish about me. You know it’s just [a place] where you were born. There’s nothing that makes me Irish like.... My brother is moving to Australia – I would kind of think of him as half and half... He’d have parts of their culture in him and their accent...I think it’s just the culture like you know. That’s what I’d associate with really the nationality that you are like.

She even expresses some scepticism in this regard:

Where your mother gave birth doesn’t make...I don’t even know where your, what nationality is...settling, contributing to the community – you’d be Irish unless you wanted to say you were something else...It must be really important but like to the government ‘cause every form you fill out asks your nationality, place of birth [even if you’re buying a car or getting new job] I’m kind of like ‘is this a trick question?’.

Even with respect to differences between British versus Irish nationalities, she notes that: ‘Sure it’s only a passport. There’s no difference.’

With regard to increasing diversity in Ireland, Liz also recounts her memories of the Black Babies campaign and her father’s negative views about immigrants. She is well travelled, has had good experiences in a variety of different cultural contexts, is open-minded and seeks out engagement with people from different cultures, whether on holiday or at work. Yet despite this, Liz most captures the anxiety currently being expressed by many Irish people about the difficulties in finding common ground with newly arrived asylum seekers and migrants:

But I suppose I wouldn’t be as inclined to go over and approach somebody that was coloured because I don’t know enough about them that way. I don’t know, I’d just be a lot more weary...Just ‘cause I think they’d have a different kind of background, they’d have a different culture...I’d probably end up just asking them like ‘....what was their terrible life like’....I’d start asking them silly questions you know that way.

While she would ‘probably feel that we [herself and Americans/Canadians] went through the same thing’ she would be ‘holding back a bit’ from engaging
with refugees because of this insecurity. She then accounts for the response of the community at large:

See they’re [others in community] probably afraid to talk to other people [migrants] you know. There’s probably that kind of, you know people are set in their ways and they’re probably saying ‘I don’t want to disturb them… I don’t want to enforce myself on them.’ So they don’t go out and talk to people, so then people don’t go out and talk to them. That’s probably what happens…I’d say a lot of coloured people feel that they’re in their way, that they don’t want to be bothering people that were here which is quite sad like. I think… in smaller proportions then people would have accepted it more, but it was just like [deep sigh], there’s just so many people coming in… it’s more evident when they take the houses and stuff like… that’s when it kind of got to people…

She agrees with the view that immigrants open Ireland up to new ideas, ‘but sometimes it’s a lot of pressure’, and she illustrates this when talking about the transformation of a long-established market on Dublin’s Moore Street:

And now it’s all different oriental food stores and where you get plaits done in your hair and stuff like that. That kind of thing is like ‘okay, it’s good but not on that street.’ It’s good somewhere but not there… ‘cause it’s the heart of Dublin, the heart of when you think of Ireland and the Irish tradition… It’s a place tourists would go, you know Moore Street, to see the vegetables, to see all the stalls. They wouldn’t see that now like… The whole street used to be full of them and that kind of thing is like, that would annoy people I would think. It kind of annoys me like ‘cause it is something that has always been there and then all of a sudden it’s gone like and there’s no trace of the way it used to be. So it’s okay like in small quantities… but not the whole street ‘cause it’s just taking over the street and that’s kind of when pressure, the tensions increase when you see stuff like that.

In addition to the observations unique to their individual biographies, all three of the participants discussed here (as well as others interviewed) included mention of many of the same aspects or events relating to Ireland/Irish society across the full range of cultural, economic, political and psychic domains: the central role of locality and small communities, the Catholic Church and clergy, nationalistic education, emigration and travel, the famine, poverty, economic boom and welfare state and the Black Babies campaign.

**Altery, Mobility and Home/Belonging in the Constitution of Racialised Identities**

Knowles observes that ‘race’ is an immense concept – ‘a lens through which other forms of alterity are refracted’ and deployed in the making of any range of social differences (Knowles 1999: 125). She argues that because it is a category of social and political analysis rather than a form of human action or behaviour, ‘race’ must be broken down into elements that are salient in the sense-making contexts of peoples’ lives. From her interviews with black/ethnic minority immigrants and transnationals in Britain – individuals she identifies as having ‘acquired’ racialised identities – she derives three dimensions that underpin the dialectic relationships between people, regimes and global forces at play in the process of ‘race’-making: alterity, mobility and home/belonging.
The present work employs these dimensions in an expanded form so they may be applied to the full complement of diaspora space inhabitants (indigenes as well as migrants). It does so on the assumption that they are defining features of all lives, and that all identities are ultimately racialised and therefore implicated in the process of ‘race’-making. As used here, **alterity** encompasses the array of Brah’s (1996) ‘axes of differentiation’ (class, gender, etc.) that shape interviewees’ sense of difference, outsidersness and alienation from the ‘majority’ of which they are identified as being part. **Mobility** is used to capture their personal and material capacity to access and move among and between different communities, positionalities and institutions. **Home/belonging** refers to the struggle to cultivate a sense of place within a rapidly changing nation. As such, this triad assists analysis of the impacts of the diverse understandings among members of the ‘mainstream’ of their ‘place’ within their society, their freedom and ability to be themselves, move comfortably and effectively across symbolic and material boundaries, and access resources and capital necessary to exercise their free choice. As discussed below, all of these factors figure prominently in what Mary, Sara and Liz bring to their encounters with Others, the conditions that move them to become cultural interlocutors (or not) and their roles in the racialised social order they co-create.

Mary’s sense of alterity arises in a local context of lifestyle and association, but seems normalised through a strong sense of family and community belonging. This culminates in the cultivation of a strong ‘other-orientation’, which is both reflected and reinforced by her fluid mobility, personally and professionally, across a wide range of communities and sectors. For Mary, ‘home’ can include lots of different people. This sensibility illuminates the roots of her pluralist, reflexive and generous view towards ‘underdogs’, and communities who are marginalised despite acknowledgement of an avowed fair-weather self-interest that underpins her account of both her own constitution as an Irish person and Irishness as a whole.

In contrast, Sara’s strong sense of difference and otherness stems from her location on the margins of society writ large, and is fed by her inability to foster a sense of place or role in the world. While this has contributed to her becoming an enterprising free spirit who is extremely fluid in terms of mobility across personal and professional boundaries, her orientation towards Others appears somewhat inconsistent and conditional, underpinned perhaps by the hierarchised social order against which she herself has been struggling. Immigrants are placed at the bottom of this hierarchy and are subject to a distorted application of her critical consciousness to the circumstances and power relations surrounding them.

Whereas Mary and Sara may embrace their sense of alterity as central to who they are – and build a home around it – Liz seeks refuge in familiar affinity groups. This is possibly to reduce or avoid the discomfort that a sense of difference brings with it, and is reflected in her emphasis on sociability and the capacity for successful face work as central components of Irish subjectivity/identity. And while her strong sense of home/belonging does create an openness with regard to cross-cultural boundaries and abstract expressions of ethno-national
identity, it also creates a clear ‘line’, gauged by the level of anxiety generated by the ‘unfamiliar’ or that which threatens to subvert the familiar.

Thus, for all three women, alterity is an issue of central concern and struggle, regardless of their various positionalities, personal constitutions or life circumstances. But it is not necessarily the deciding factor in relation to their constitution of Others. The material consequences and manifestations of that difference – in terms of successful mobility – provide important clues to the social and institutional factors that shape the lens through which people ‘see’ Others from their own locations within the social order. Whilst the three dimensions overlap to a considerable extent, it appears that a positive sense of home/belonging provides a foundation of subjective continuity and security. It provides a comfort zone of self-assurance, which in turn serves as a transcultural threshold for their construction of and response to ‘newcomers’ and ‘new’ communities – who are themselves seeking to achieve the same sense of home and belonging through negotiations of their own alterity and mobility.

Conclusions

Ireland, for much of its history, has been located on the social and economic margins of Europe. It is a notably globally oriented country whose very populace is characterised by a marked sense of fluidity and movement, as emigrants and world travellers, yet ultimately quite parochial in terms of ‘worldliness’, well-known for clique-ishness, insularity and conservatism. While many are newly empowered and confident in the wake of the Celtic Tiger, seeking to engage the world on their own terms, they are still fraught by the rapidly changing times. The idea of ‘culture shock’, both generally and as articulated by both Sara and Liz, constitutes a compelling metaphor for the current national era. Increasing numbers of Filipino nurses, Chinese bar staff, the new daily bus service from Warsaw, Irish-speaking Muslims and elected officials of African origin are everyday reminders of the realities of an increasingly multi-ethnic Irish society.

The work presented in this chapter illuminates the ways majority ethnic Irish people cultivate their subjectivities – in dialogue with and resistance to the parameters of a mythic unified, homogenous national culture and social order – shape their orientations towards the Immigrant Other, whose stories, lives and biographies are, in turn, reconfiguring their own. It demonstrates the value and necessity of moving beyond the static, essentialising categories of ethnicity, nationalism and citizenship associated with modernity and nation building, to a focus on ‘belonging as an act and a process…[in order] to capture the richness, nuance and variety of the social and political conditions under which people commit and entrust their loyalty to larger communities’ (Christensen and Hedetoft 2004: 2). Work that locates examination of these dynamics within the vastly heterogeneous communities of ‘mainstream’ majority as well as ‘new’ minority ethnic populace will play a crucial role in charting the building blocks of new forms of identities, and the social relations and institutional structures within which they are embedded and reproduced. Such approaches resituate these
debates within the wider field of global transformations of which im/migration is only one dimension, but in which ‘race’-making continues to be central.

Notes

1 This chapter draws on research from the ‘Changing Irish Identities’ project, funded by the Irish Higher Education Authority and the project, ‘Diversity, Civil Society and Social Change in Ireland’, funded by an Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences Government of Ireland Research Fellowship.


3 For an overview of research in the area see Cotter (2004).

4 Part of the project is located in the Identity, Diversity and Citizenship Research Programme at UCD’s Geary Institute (see www.ucd.ie/geary/research/IDCResearch.html). The interviews were conducted by Dr Theresa O’Keefe.

5 A Black Irish pop singer.

6 This campaign involved soliciting donations to alleviate famine and poverty in Africa, using the phrase ‘[give] a penny for the Black babies’.

7 Presenter of an Irish radio chat show, Liveline.

References


