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**'Because She Never Let Them In':  
Irish Immigration a Century Ago and Today**

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'BECAUSE SHE NEVER LET THEM IN':  
IRISH IMMIGRATION A CENTURY AGO AND TODAY

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## ABSTRACT

A century ago, and for most of the twentieth century, Ireland was a land of emigration, not immigration. However, in the space of less than a decade in the 2000s, Ireland was transformed from a homogeneous community, where non-native residents were in a very small minority, to one in which one-sixth of its inhabitants are foreign-born. The paper will compare immigration and attitudes towards immigrants in the very different Irelands of a century ago and of the present.

KEYWORDS: immigration, racism, Ireland, public opinion

## 'Because she never let them in'

Until a decade or so ago, Ireland was a land of emigration, not immigration. Since the Great Famine, both the broad contours of, and short-term fluctuations in, Irish population change were determined by net migration, not by natural increase; and it was emigration that made Ireland, uniquely among European countries, lose population for over a century. Much as been written on the ramifications of that emigration, both for Ireland and for host countries.

Over the past decade or so, however, it is immigration that has loomed largest in Ireland. In 1991 the number of Irish residents born outside the country numbered 228,725, or six per cent of the total population, and only 40,341 of those had been born outside the United Kingdom or the United States. Two decades later (in 2011) the foreign-born numbered 766,770, or 17 per cent of the total, and three-fifths (or 10.6 per cent) of those were from outside the United Kingdom. The big rise in the numbers of residents of east European origin—and especially the influx from Poland—are often highlighted, but between 2002 and 2011 the number of African-born residents doubled (from 26,515 to 54,419) and that of Asian-born residents almost trebled (from 28,132 to 79,021). Not only was the influx unprecedented on Paddy's green shamrock shore; it was also massive—in relative, not in absolute terms—by present-day European standards (Figure 1).

Now, with the passing of the Celtic Tiger, emigration looms large again.

In the year ending April 2012, over 87,000 left, more than half of them Irish, the others non-nationals seeking better opportunities elsewhere.

A century ago, a much smaller immigration was the spark for a famous passage in the 'Nestor' episode in James Joyce's *Ulysses*:

Mr. Deasy halted, breathing hard and swallowing his breath.

-- *I just wanted to say, he said. Ireland, they say, has the honour of being the only country which never persecuted the Jews. Do you know that? No. And do you know why?* He frowned sternly on the bright air.

-- *Why, sir?* Stephen asked, beginning to smile.

-- *Because she never let them in, Mr. Deasy said solemnly.*

The passage is interesting for several reasons. One for the *literati* is that Stephen's bigoted companion Garrett Deasy with 'his angry, white moustache' was not a Catholic Dubliner, but a northern Protestant—a Protestant 'Citizen', in effect. A second, much more important, is that she (Ireland) *did* let them in. In 1904 there were still virtually no restrictions on immigration into Ireland or anywhere else in the United Kingdom—although hostility in Britain to the immigration of people seen as 'paupers' and 'criminals' led to the Aliens Act of 1905. That legislation was directed chiefly against East European Jews.<sup>2</sup> A third reason why Deasy's claim, to which I will return, is interesting is that it is an exaggeration to say that Ireland 'persecuted the Jews'.

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<sup>2</sup>Gainer, *Alien Invasion*.

A more interesting question is why did the Jews want to settle in Ireland at a time when tens of thousands were leaving it. Why didn't they go elsewhere? One answer is that, for the most part, they did. Ireland's Jewish population was always miniscule. Data on flows are lacking, but between the late 1860s and the Great War Ireland's stock of non-UK and non-American born residents fell from a miniscule 6,811 in 1861 to 6,142 (or 0.14 per cent of the population) in 1911.<sup>3</sup> In 1911 Russian-born Jews accounted for almost one-third of the total, and there were 5,148 professing the Jewish religion.

Thanks to one Leopold Bloom, the Jewish immigration is well documented.<sup>4</sup> Less is known about a much smaller but more or less contemporaneous immigration from Italy. On the eve of the Great War Ireland's Italian community numbered about four hundred; excluding transient sailors, there were 171 Italians in 1851, 255 in 1871, 340 in 1891, and 276 in 1901. Thanks to the relatively new technique of web scraping, it is not difficult to construct a profile of the small Italian community in 1911.

The two migrations had some things in common. Both Jews and Italians were subject to some resentment and abuse. The treatment meted out to the Jews has been the focus of a good deal of research, but there was hostility to the Italians also, albeit of a different kind, from various quarters.

Neighbourhood residents sometimes resented their fish-and-chip shops and

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<sup>3</sup>Excluding the 1,620 Indian-born residents in 1861 as presumably in the main the children or relatives of Irish natives—in 1911 there were only 198 who had been born in all of Asia—would not alter the balance much.

<sup>4</sup>Hyman, *Jews of Ireland*; Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-century Ireland*; Ó Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*.

ice cream parlours for the noisy, unruly custom they attracted. For example, the vicar of St. Anne's and others objected to Edmund Caveri's fish-and-chip shop on nearby South Anne Street for 'improper characters' it attracted, and Celeste Macari in Derry was fined for allowing gaming on his premises.<sup>5</sup> In Belfast Italians were vulnerable to sectarian attacks, as when in December 1910 a crowd of youths on their way down the Shankill Road stoned the window of an Italian shop-front near Carrick Hill. One of occupants fired a shot into the crowd, and this resulted in a 'regular vendetta' against all Italians in Belfast that night, with the smashing of the windows of virtually every shop in the south and west of the city. A year and a half later, Italian-run ice cream shops were again the target of gangs of anti-Catholic 'youths and mill girls'.<sup>6</sup> But the hostility that greeted Jews and Italians was not enough to prevent them from staying and making a decent living in Ireland.

In both communities later there was a shared belief or memory that the migration had been, in part anyway, 'accidental'. The story goes that Giuseppe (or Joseph) Cervi, who is credited with having introduced Dubliners to fish-and-chips<sup>7</sup>, 'disembarked from an American ship in Cobh' in the late 1880s, convinced he was in New York. From there he 'made his way to Dublin on foot, and, having worked for some time for an Italian stonemason called Bassi, he bought a cart, from which he would sell chips'<sup>8</sup>. Another account reports that Cervi 'began by selling chips from a stall in the street, on

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<sup>5</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 4 January 1908; *Irish Times*, 2 May 1913.

<sup>6</sup> *Irish Times*, 10 December 1910, 6 July 1912.

<sup>7</sup> On the early history of fish-and-chips, see Lawton, *Fish and Chips*.

<sup>8</sup> Reynolds, *Casalattico*, 46; Power, *Terra straniera*, 23.

the spot where Pearse Street fire station now is'. It states that he got the idea from a Russian 'who used to run a hot potato stall on Tara Street', but adds that he had also seen chips in England 'and decided to launch them on the Irish'. The shop that an illiterate Giuseppi (Joseph) Cervi opened almost across the street from the old Queen's Theatre was still operated by his grandson in 1960.<sup>9</sup>

Similar themes crop up in Jewish oral accounts. Gerald Goldberg, son of an immigrant Litvak, described the arrival of Jews in Cork as an accident. Reaching the port of Queenstown, they were duped by the colloquial claim that 'America is the next parish'. Another more colorful version of this tale recounts that calls of 'Cork, Cork' were mistaken for 'New York', prompting 'befuddled, bedraggled, wandering Jews' to disembark in Cobh.<sup>10</sup> But specialists on migration dismiss such tales about 'accidental' destinations.<sup>11</sup> And so there is no need to wonder why Giuseppe Cervi believed Queenstown was New York. Indeed, the implication that he had spent some time in England before coming to Ireland begs the question why he would have landed in Queenstown.

Similarly, if Cervi learned from a Russian (possibly Jewish?) immigrant, it is said that some of the early Jewish immigrants in Dublin took to selling holy

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<sup>9</sup>*Irish Times*, 21 May 1960, 'Italy in Dublin'. Cervi was recorded as 'Chervie' by the enumerator in 1911. He was still renting a boarding-house on Little Ship Street in 1911, as he had been a decade earlier.

<sup>10</sup>Ó Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*, 25-26.

<sup>11</sup>Cesarani, 'The myth of origins'; Klier, 'Emigration mania in late-imperial Russia'. Here I might mention in passing Patrick O'Farrell's scathing dismissal of oral history (O'Farrell 1979) as 'image, selective memory, later overlays and utter subjectivity'.



pictures after seeing Italians producing them; and one story, which I owe to the late Asher Benson, mentions a Jewish family discovering a shed full of pictures and statues in the back yard of a newly occupied house on the South Circular Road, and starting off trade in that way.<sup>12</sup> And other cameos reveal curious parallels. Thus in May 1908 a Roscommon man got a month's hard labour for assaulting an Italian decorator named Brinteni with a thatcher's knife. His excuse was that Brinteni refused to drink with him. This recalls an incident in Cork two decades earlier, when a trades council delegate complained in the course of anti-semitic tirade that local Jews 'would not eat or shake hands with a Christian'.<sup>13</sup> Otherness was a two-way street.

In both communities, the migrations had been associated in communal memory with a small place in the home country; the tiny village of Akmeyan (or Akmene) (with a population of 2,800 today) in northwestern Lithuania in the case of the Jews, and Lazio's Val di Comino, about 100 km from Rome, and in particular the small community of Casalattico (population 700 today) in the case of the Italians. One strong hint of an early Casalese presence is that two of the four organ grinders convicted of assaulting two Irishmen on Dublin's Chancery Lane in November 1887 had surnames closely

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<sup>12</sup>Ó Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*, 56.

<sup>13</sup>*Irish Times*, May 7 1908; Ó Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*, 187.

linked to the village.<sup>14</sup> The links underline an important characteristic of both flows—the key role of chain migration.

The link with Casalattico would seem to find further corroboration in the remarkably high proportion of Italians—nearly four in every five—in Ireland in the mid-1980s who had been born in the region of Lazio. Next in importance of Italy's eighteen regions came Lombardy, which accounted for only 72 of the total of 2,312 Italian-born residents<sup>15</sup>. Yet this exaggerates the Casalattican component in Italian immigration in the interim.

In 1911 Ireland contained fewer than four hundred immigrants of Italian stock. Their surnames imply that were a varied bunch, by no means exclusively from Casalattico. Interestingly, too, 93 of the 104 of those identified as Casalatticans by their surnames lived in County Antrim or in the neighbouring counties of Down and Armagh. The 1911 census suggests that all of Ireland's 28 Fuscus then lived in Belfast, as did all but two of the 44 Fortes. In 1911 only a dozen with common Val di Comino surnames—including the Cervis—lived in Dublin.<sup>16</sup> That the north of Ireland had been the

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<sup>14</sup> *Irish Times*, Nov 8 1887. Their names were Forti and Macari. The others were Scantori (*sic, recte* Scantore) and D'obriolo. For lists of Casalattico/Val di Comino surnames see: [http://www.allthingsitaliane.com/surname\\_database.htm](http://www.allthingsitaliane.com/surname_database.htm); <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/ANGLO-ITALIAN/2002-12/1040297141>.

<sup>15</sup> As reported in Reynolds, *Casalattico*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> Salazar reckoned that there were about three hundred Italians in Dublin, a few less in Belfast, about fifty in Cork, and another hundred or so scattered around the island. This is an exaggeration the total, but he may have included the children of those born in Italy. According to Salazar the community included two groups. One came from Lucca and was made up of artisans, plaster workers, and woodworkers, with surnames like Bassi, Corrieri, Deghini, Giuliani and Nanetti. The second came from the Val di Comino and in this group Salazar counted 40 Fortes, 19 Fuscus, and other typical Casalattican names, all either street-sellers of ice cream or café owners [as

original focus of Casalese immigration is corroborated by Reynold's research in Casalattico in the early 1990s (Reynolds 1993: 99). Dublin's Italians were more likely to have had Tuscan connections a century ago; they included Joseph Patrick Nanetti M.P., one-time lord mayor of Dublin son of Giuseppe, a sculptor from Lucca.

Those who settled in Belfast formed their own little ghetto, much like the Jews did.<sup>17</sup> But this was not a ghetto in the literal sense, any more than Dublin's Little Jerusalem, since from the outset the Italians lived cheek by jowl with the locals.

A century ago Belfast was Linenopolis—and more—and a far more dynamic place than Dublin. It also contained more people, even allowing for Dublin's middle-class suburbs of Rathmines and Pembroke. On that basis it should have been more likely to attract immigrants than Dublin. On the eve of the Great War, indeed, Belfast contained more Italians than Dublin, but the Jews settled mostly in Dublin. The paradox is explained by the Jews' specialization in activities that targeted mainly the less well off. Both Italian and Jewish immigrants catered to non-overlapping niches as classic 'middleman minorities'. As the *Weekly Irish Times* noted of the Jewish 'foreigner':<sup>18</sup>

With his inherent alertness he soon discovered that the very

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reported in

[www.casalattico.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=11&Itemid=121](http://www.casalattico.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11&Itemid=121)].

<sup>17</sup> In its heyday Belfast's Little Italy 'consisted of the city end of Nelson Street, Great Patrick Street, Little Patrick Street, Carolina Street, Academy Street, and the lower end of Frederick Street' (Doherty n.d.)

<sup>18</sup> *Weekly Irish Times*, 'The Jewish Community in Dublin', Jan 8 1898.

poverty of the people offered him promises of mutual benefit. He at once set himself out to supply the poor Irishman and woman with such necessities and luxuries, which they could never procure unless he, the Jew, formed the intermediary.

So the Jews concentrated at the outset on peddling, on selling goods on credit through their so-called 'weekly' system, and on moneylending, whereas the Italians specialized successively in organ grinding, ice cream and confectionery, and fish and chips.

The communities also, for a few years at least, had a street in common. Members of the Dublin Metropolitan Police found accommodation for some of the first Litvak settlers in a tenement next to the police station in Chancery Lane. There they lived 'in a little square wherein stood the police station, Chancery Lane, joining the other foreigners — Italian organ-grinders, bear-leaders, one-man-band operators, and makers of small, cheap plaster casts of the saints of the Catholic church'. By the 1870s Chancery Lane, originally a small but elegant street of three- and four-storey buildings, was already in a state of dilapidation, and home to 'a miscellaneous population whose avocations it would be difficult to describe'.<sup>19</sup> The Jews left quickly for what would become Little Jerusalem, but the Italians stayed on: there were almost as many of them and their Irish-born families there in 1911 (49) as there had been in 1901 (52).

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<sup>19</sup> *Irish Times*, 26 Dec 1889. See too Ó Gráda, 'Settling in'.

In 1911 Ireland had twelve Italian-born organ grinders or street 'musicians', five (again judging by surnames) from Casalattico and seven from elsewhere. This emblematic employment had long been associated with Italian immigrants. The number of Italian-born 'musicians' recorded in the census rose from ten in 1851 to peak of forty-two in 1891. The organ-grinders emerge in press cameos such as that of the murder in February 1841 of organ-grinder Domenico Garlibardo in Rathfarnham<sup>20</sup>; or the court case taken in May 1888 by a woman named Marcella, wife of an organ-grinder, against another organ-grinder named Violante and his wife, which was attended by 'about a dozen from what might be called the Italian colony'; Signora Marcella's claim that she was assaulted by Violante and his wife was counted by Signora Violante's insistence, backed by several witnesses, that it was Signora Marcella who started the fighting.<sup>21</sup> An amusing gloss on organ-grinders is given by the story of two Casalatticans, Carmano Nardone and Giovanni Capeldi, who were charged in 1904 with annoying the well-known writer George Moore by playing outside his house in up-market Ely Place, 'and refusing to desist when asked to do so'. Moore complained that the noise was intolerable but Capeldi protested that he left when he had finished

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<sup>20</sup> Garlibardo, a young man, lived in Maiden Lane off Wood Street with two compatriot organ-grinders, Vernice and Giovanni Fraco. On the day he was murdered he was in the company of two other Italians, Giovanni Bianco and Giovanni Rivere. Several Italians were taken into custody: their names were given as Michele Cecile, Giovanni Stello, Giovanni Caslarino, Tomaso Riva, Giovanni Rivere, Giovanni Beauchitte, Giuseppe Muchette, Giuseppe Fraco (*Freeman's Journal*, March 5 1841, November 3 1842).

<sup>21</sup> Power, *Terra straniera*, 29; <http://www.chaptersofdublin.com/books/Neighbourhood/chapter10.html>; *Irish Times*, May 11 1888. For details of another inter-family fracas see *Irish Times*, August 21 1882.

the tune, and promised not to play outside Moore's house any more. The Italians posted a £5 bond to desist from 'a deliberate persecution'.<sup>22</sup>

A long-standing custom of the organ grinders was their annual New Year's concert in Chancery Lane, epicentre of the Dublin Italian community. In 1884 this involved 'over a dozen organs [being] wheeled into the thoroughfare and as twelve o'clock struck the men began to grind as many different airs'. Other musicians joined in, generating a 'hideous' cacophony of sound, a big crowd, and 'much laughter and amusement, [but] no disorder'.<sup>23</sup> A decade later this boisterous annual event was on the wane, although the Italians 'dressed in their picturesque native costumes appeared at the windows and doors of the houses with smiling faces and cheery words of salutations to the passers by.'<sup>24</sup> On New Year's Day 1901 the *Irish Times* rather lamented 'the serenading crowds, and the sounds of squealing instruments from almost every window of the tumble-down houses, and the great fete of intolerable noise which drowned the neighbouring bells of the two cathedrals'.

Moreover, in 1911 the occupational profile of the Castalatticans differed markedly from that of the majority non-Casalatticans. Of the quarter with occupations (n=62) who had Casalattican surnames, twenty-six were ice cream vendors and another twenty-one were confectioners or shopkeepers. Only one or two of the Casalatticans were fish-and-chip merchants, however

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<sup>22</sup> *Irish Times*, Jan 2 1904.

<sup>23</sup> *Clutha Leader*, Volume X, Issue 543, March 7 1884, p. 3  
[<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=CL18840307.2.18>].

<sup>24</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, Jan 1 1894.

(compare Reynolds 1993: 48). They were less likely to be labourers than non-Casalatticans and also less likely to be white collar.

To return very briefly to Chancery Lane, seven of the eight Italian male household heads living there in 1901 had married Irishwomen. Moreover, they had married women who were younger than them by an average of ten years or so, and in all cases but one it was a case of Italian men who could neither read nor write marrying literate Irishwomen. If these older, illiterate Italians were considered good catches, what does this say about Irishmen? The habit of marrying out seems to have been prevalent among Dublin's Italian immigrants<sup>25</sup>, whereas in Belfast marrying within a more tightly knit, mainly Casalese community was the norm. Reynolds (1993: 109) highlights how Casalese households in Ireland maintained their traditions, with 'the second generation—that is, those who were born in Ireland—usually speak dialect to their children'.

The Jewish community at the outset was also extremely close-knit and inward looking, and rich in social capital. The Italians were also clannish, but they integrated more readily. Many of the Italian men recorded in 1911 had married out, including six of the seven based in Cork. And a few even changed religion while doing so: the 1911 census records three cases of Belfast-based Italian men who had changed religion in order to marry local women, and that of mosaic worker Rego Trosone who married a Presbyterian but remained Catholic.

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Nannetti's father had also married out.

Finally, both immigrations, like the much bigger reverse flow out of Ireland, were overwhelmingly economic in origin. Here is an account based on the experiences of Myer Joel Wigoder, who would set up a highly successful paint-and-wallpaper retailing business in Dublin:

When my grandfather, Myer Joel Wigoder, left Lithuania in 1891, his destination was Holland. His motivations for leaving home and family to start a new life elsewhere were entirely economic. As I read through his works of memoirs... I find no reference to any anti-Semitic experience or to the atmosphere of pogrom and persecution... Various business ventures had not succeeded... so at the age of thirty-six he left his pregnant wife and four children and headed west.

It was likewise with another Dublin immigrant, Lieb Berman. A brother-in-law had set him up as a brewer in Lithuania, but 'he made it so good that he lost heavily on every brew'. When he switched to peddling, 'his horse ate up every groschen he had'. The final straw was the spoilage of a cartload of fish on a sweltering day en route to Wexna market. His exasperated wife, hearing about a kinsman's success in Ireland, sent her husband packing. And Louis Wine's spur was a letter home from a stepbrother who, 'having found his way to Ireland wrote glowingly of the country, saying he felt it was a land of great opportunity'.<sup>26</sup> As often happens, such plausible, matter-of-fact accounts do not square with collective or folk memory.

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<sup>26</sup> Ó Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*, 16-7.



*BACK TO MR. DEASY:*

Mr. Deasy's 'she never let them in' is far from the truth a century later. As noted at the outset, Ireland's immigrant inflow in the 2000s, sudden and big, was unmatched in relative terms anywhere else in western Europe (Figure 1). Some of it, it is true, consisted of returning Irish immigrants, but most did not. The acid test of Irish tolerance, then, is not what happened in Mr. Deasy's day, but what is happening a century later. At first sight the impact of immigration on Irish attitudes is curious and ambivalent. On the one hand, it has not—so far at least—given rise to the xenophobic brand of politics currently in the ascendant across much of Europe. Ireland lacks a Front National, a Northern League, or a Geert Wilders, and the established political parties, including Sinn Féin, have given a wide berth—again, so far—to representatives seeking to capitalize on anti-immigrant sentiment.

[Figure 1 about here]

On the other hand, incidents of ill treatment meted out to Jewish or Italian immigrants a century or so ago pale into relative insignificance compared to those inflicted on Irish immigrants in the recent past.<sup>27</sup> In mid-June 2009 twenty Roma families consisting of about a hundred people were forced out of their homes in the Village area of south Belfast. Most of them returned home to Romania, although by mid-July they were waiting to hear if

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<sup>27</sup> Compare Edmund Sanders, 'African refugees in Israel get a cold shoulder and worse', *Los Angeles Times*, May 27 2012.

it was safe to return.<sup>28</sup> To my knowledge nothing as violent was inflicted on the Italian or Jewish communities a century ago, nor was any Italian or Jewish immigrant was murdered for racist reasons.

No physical harm was inflicted on the Belfast Roma. But on a wet evening in January 2002, English-language student and Chinese national Zhao Liutao (29) was murdered in Beaumont in north Dublin on his way home from a night out. The BBC described this as Ireland's 'first racially motivated murder'. In February 2008 Marius Szwajkos and Pavel Kalite, two Polish migrant workers in their late twenties, were murdered in Drimnagh; over two years later a youth from the area was found guilty of their murder. Toyosi Shittabey, a 15-year old of Nigerian origin from Tyrelstown in west Dublin was murdered 2 April 2010, as he tried to stop an altercation. In March 2012 three men were jailed for killing Polish national Lukasz Rzeszutko (27) in Coolock in the north of the city on his way to work on 2nd October 2010. One of the culprits said they did it for a 'buzz'. In November 2011 Nigerian taxi driver Moses Ayanwole was brutally attacked by a white passenger on Dublin's Pearse Street and died of his injuries a few days later. Some at least of these murders were racially motivated. Mr. Deasy would have said 'I told you so'.

Nor has Northern Ireland been immune. In Carrickfergus on June 24 1996 the owner of a Chinese takeaway was robbed and murdered in an

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<sup>28</sup> Henry McDonald, 'Romanian gypsies beware beware, loyalist C18 are coming to beat you like a baiting bear', *Observer*, June 1 2009; Henry McDonald, 'Pipe bomb threat to Roma discovered', *Observer*, June 28 2009; 'Hard times for Roma who fled Belfast' [[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/8143368.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/8143368.stm)].

attack deemed racist by the police. And in Newry in July 2009 40-year old Marek Muszynski was the victim of a racially motivated murder.

Successive opinion polls also point to significant anti-immigrant feeling. A September 2008 poll<sup>29</sup> found that two-thirds of respondents wanted more restrictive immigration laws, whereas only seven per cent favoured less restrictive laws. This provoked the *Irish Examiner* to editorialize, 'Our attitude towards immigrants maybe about to face a sterner test than before. Let us hope we pass it.'<sup>30</sup> Another poll just over a year later<sup>31</sup> reported a big majority (72 per cent) wanting to see a reduction in the number of immigrants. Over two-fifths declared that they would like to see some, but not all, immigrants leave, while 29 per cent would like to see most leave, and just over one in four was happy to leave the number as it was.

Further insight into attitudes to immigration may be gained from the Irish National Election Study [INES], a panel survey carried out by the ESRI between 2002 and 2007. The main focus of INES was voting behavior in two general elections, but it included some questions that bear on immigration. Three of the relevant variables (*V0245-V0247*) required responses on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to specific statements about travellers and immigrants. The first (*V0245*) stipulated that people should not have to put up with halting sites in their area; the second (*V0247*) that there should be strict limits on immigration; and the third that immigrants should

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<sup>29</sup> Conducted by Amárach Research.

<sup>30</sup> *Examiner*, September 10 2008.

<sup>31</sup> *Irish Times*, November 11 2009.

adapt to Irish customs (*V0246*). The other two refer to age (*V0906*) and educational level attained (*V0921*). Table 1 describes the raw correlations between these five variables. The high correlations between *V0245*, *V0246*, and *V0247* show that hostility to immigrants was strongly correlated with hostility to travellers, implying that apart from any economic threat they presented, immigrants were perceived by some as undesirables as 'others' or 'different'.

Age was not a good predictor of attitudes, but the level of education was. More educated people tended to be more tolerant of difference but perhaps this was because they did not live cheek by jowl with either travellers or immigrants.

[Table 1 and Figures 2 and 3 about here]

Since 2003 Eurobarometer pollsters have asked citizens the question: What do you think are the two most important issues facing (country X) at the moment? Respondents were asked to choose two of fourteen possible answers (unemployment, the economy, terrorism, crime, housing, healthcare, immigration, inflation, pensions, taxation, education, the environment, public transport, other).<sup>32</sup> Figures 2 and 3 report the outcome in a selection of member-states including Ireland. In Figure 2 the importance of three factors—immigration, unemployment, and the state of the economy—are

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<sup>32</sup> For the most recent data see [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb78/eb78\\_anx\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb78/eb78_anx_en.pdf).

described. Before the collapse of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland none of these issues mattered very much, but in recent years people have begun to worry a lot about unemployment and the economy. However, the proportion of people listing immigration as one their top two concerns has remained small. This is in sharp contrast with some other European economies such as the United Kingdom. In Ireland immigration featured among the top two concerns only in a small minority of cases, less than almost anywhere else.

Figure 3 compares the importance of immigration in public opinion directly, with Ireland in green and gold in all panels. Only in Portugal did immigration matter less than Ireland. Thus while other evidence shows that the Irish are unhappy with the recent and current high levels of immigration, this Eurobarometer poll suggests that it is not their main preoccupation. Nor, if this poll is any guide, has the economic downturn had a huge impact on attitudes, so far anyway.

According to *Eurobarometer 66* [2006], 56 per cent of Irish people still believed in 2006 that 'immigrants contribute a lot' to the country. This represented a much more positive view of immigration than the European average (40 per cent). In that poll Swedes were most pro-immigration (79 per cent), followed by the Portuguese (66 per cent), and then the Irish. Most hostile were Estonians, Latvians, and Slovaks. A very recent (June 2012) Eurobarometer survey asked for an opinion on the statement 'Immigration enriches (our country) economically and culturally'. A majority of Irish respondents still expressed a positive opinion (Table 2) but they were further down the pro-European pecking order than in 2006.

Elsewhere Kevin Denny and I analyze evolving Irish attitudes to immigration using Irish responses to questions about immigration in the European Social Survey (ESS). The outcome of that work is reported in a separate paper. We show that Irish attitudes towards immigration, as captured by a synthetic variable based on six different questions in the ESS, have hardened with the economic downturn. Between 2002 and 2006, as immigration rose rapidly, public opinion became, Not surprisingly, the economic downturn after 2007 had a negative impact on attitudes to immigration. At the same time there is evidence that the Irish have become more accepting of people from very different backgrounds. How the trends in Irish opinion have diverged from those of other European countries is an interesting question, which Denny and I aim to address next.

*FRIEDMAN'S DILEMMA:*

Economist Milton Friedman's assertion that 'you cannot simultaneously have free immigration and a welfare state' has been interpreted as an argument against immigration by some commentators and an argument for curbing or harmonizing welfare systems by others. A century ago this dilemma did not arise, but the growth of the welfare state has led to fears in host countries that some immigration is welfare- rather than employment-driven. A 'blue card' system that excludes non-citizen immigrants from some or all welfare entitlements, as in the cases of Kuwait and Singapore, has sometimes been invoked as a solution. The exclusion of Italian immigrants

from social security benefits unless they have been paying for them, and from healthcare apart from emergency hospital treatment, is in this tradition—although you might not think so from anti-immigrant propaganda—as are the recent proposals by UK Labour spokesperson on immigration Yvette Cooper<sup>33</sup>. Friedman, an implacable enemy of the welfare state, declared his opposition to such measures, but supporters of immigration such as Lant Pritchett and Tito Boeri<sup>34</sup>, view them as the only way of reconciling two desirables.

Most studies of present-day immigration find that immigrants are net contributors to the public purse. Nevertheless, the sense that immigration entails welfare tourism is real<sup>35</sup>, and opinion polls which reveal that those who believe that there are 'too many' immigrants are much more likely to declare that they constitute a fiscal burden. The image of immigrants as welfare tourists has been the most important cause of hostility to immigration in Europe, outstripping fears of job market competition and crime. Tim Hatton and Jeff Williamson<sup>36</sup> have found that the richer and more unequal the host country and the more extensive its welfare system, the greater is the hostility towards immigrants.

The unease tempered by equanimity about half a million non-

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<sup>33</sup> 'Labour outlines measures to restrict benefits for new EU arrivals in UK', *Guardian*, 7 March 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Pritchett [<http://reason.com/archives/2008/01/24/ending-global-apartheid/4>]; Boeri 2008; 2009.

<sup>35</sup> In August 2012 A district court judge had to apologize for having suggested in court that 'social welfare [w]as a Polish charity' (*Irish Times*, August 2 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Hatton and Williamson, 'The Impact of Immigration'.

nationals contrasts sharply with the panic and consternation in Ireland caused by one relatively small category of asylum seekers in the early 2000s. In Ireland the perception that some immigrants were abusing the welfare and citizenship systems was inextricably linked to the controversy surrounding the 27th referendum on citizenship, voted on in June 2004. The story goes back to 1987<sup>37</sup>, when a High Court ruling involving Nigerian-born Bankole Lawrence Fajujonu and his Moroccan-born wife Zohra Fajujonu, both illegal residents, and their Irish-born daughter Miriam, recognized Miriam's right to citizenship under Articles 40-42 of the constitution, thereby opening the way—on the premise that children would not be separated from their parents—for what Attorney General Michael McDowell would later call 'citizenship tourism'<sup>38</sup>. The Supreme Court confirmed the decision of the High Court in 1989. First to take advantage of the door opened by the Fajujonu judgment were Nigerians resident in other European

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<sup>37</sup> The appeal of Workers Party leader, the late Tomás Mac Giolla, on behalf of the Fajujonus in the Dáil on November 20 1984 received the following reply from Michael Noonan, Minister for Justice:

Mr. Fajujonu's presence in this country only came to the notice of my Department earlier this year. It is difficult to accept that his failure to comply with the immigration laws was due to ignorance of the law as he had had quite an amount of dealings with the immigration authorities in the UK. He was refused permission to stay there any longer and he had appealed against that decision. His appeal was refused. The fact that an alien — otherwise considered unsuitable — is the parent of a child born here is not regarded as sufficient grounds to allow the parent stay here. Mr. Fajujonu's permission to stay in the country expires today. If he does not comply with the request to leave, consideration will have to be given to what further action should be taken.

<sup>38</sup> Breen, Haynes, and Devereux, 'Citizens, loopholes, and maternity tourists'; Ní Chiosáin, 'Passports for the New Irish?'



Union countries, who realized that residency status in Ireland would mean freer movement within the EU; they were followed by mothers-to-be from Nigeria itself, often from wealthy families, who sought to capitalize on the benefits of having a family member with Irish citizenship; these women did 'not depend on the Irish government for support throughout their stay in Ireland [but] often reside[d] in a hotel till they deliver[ed] their baby'; once they obtained the baby's birth certificate, they returned home.<sup>39</sup> Finally, pregnant women from other countries also began to avail of the loophole in increasing numbers.

In January 2000 Peter McKenna, master of the Dublin's Rotunda maternity hospital, expressed wonder at how women, 'mainly Nigerians but also Eastern Europeans,...can manage to travel half way across the world pregnant and walk in the door to us at 39 weeks'. He was 'past the stage of being surprised at the number of refugees giving birth in Ireland but [he had] no doubt whatsoever that the system [was] being exploited'<sup>40</sup>. The Annual Clinical Report of the Coombe, another maternity hospital, for the year 2000 (p. 90) noted that 'media reports continue to draw attention to the number of pregnant asylum seekers attending maternity hospitals throughout the country for delivery'. The head of Garda Immigration in Dun Laoghaire explained: 'They're coming in very close to birth and seem to be waiting until the very last minute to make the trip over. Most of them would be seven or

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<sup>39</sup> Kómoláfé, 'Searching for Fortune'.

<sup>40</sup> *Irish Independent*, January 24 2000.

eight months pregnant and can be very distressed. It would look like they are coming here to have their baby and get Irish citizenship'<sup>41</sup>. In 2002 a report compiled by the Eastern Regional Health Authority highlighted the stress on staff in maternity hospitals, and noted that staff members were sometimes verbally abused by patients and accused of being racist. The hospitals claimed that 'the vast majority of pregnant asylum seekers are from Nigeria'.

In April 2002 the High Court overturned its own 1987 ruling and in January 2003 the Supreme Court upheld its verdict. This meant that Irish-born children could be deported with their non-citizen parents, unless the latter agreed to be deported alone. In June 2004 this ruling was superseded by the Citizenship Referendum, which sundered the link between birth in Ireland and citizenship. Henceforth the constitutional right to citizenship would be restricted to those with at least at least one parent who is an Irish citizen or entitled to be an Irish citizen.

The 1937 Constitution unknowingly embodied Leopold Bloom's response to the Citizen's barbed question in *Ulysses*, 'What is your nation if I may ask?', to which Bloom replied, 'Ireland. I was born here. Ireland.' In the eyes of those who enacted and supported the citizenship referendum welfare tourism made the definition parlous. The rhetoric of the referendum campaign pitted 'good' immigrants who came to Ireland to work against 'bad' immigrants who sought to take advantage of its welfare regime.

The referendum passed overwhelmingly, by a margin of 4 to 1. There was very little variation across the country in the proportions for and against,

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<sup>41</sup> *Irish Independent*, January 24 2000.

unlike in, say, the case of the referenda on the Nice Treaty in 2001, Crisis Pregnancy in 2002, or Fiscal Stability in 2011.

Data gratefully received from one of Dublin's three maternity hospitals on mothers' nationalities from the late 1990s to the present confirm both the motive for the rise in births up to the 2004 referendum and the effectiveness of the closing the loophole. Here I focus on the movement in 'late bookings', i.e. the practice of contacting the hospital for the first time not long before giving birth. Figures 4a and 4b present the results of analyzing annual data on the intervals between 'booking' or registering with the hospital and giving birth. For convenience I grouped the outcome in intervals of 0-29, 30-59, 60-99, 100-149, 150-99, and 200+ days before birth. For the standpoint of public health, clearly the longer is the notice given by the mother-to-be, the better the quality of antenatal care.

Figure 4a describes the pattern yielded by Irish, British, and Chinese-born mothers. It is one consistent with Ireland's very low neonatal mortality rate. The percentage of women notifying the hospital less than sixty days before giving birth was very low throughout. In 1999-2005 in all three cases, the modal interval between notifying the hospital and giving birth was 150-199 days. The modal interval rose to 200+ days in 2006.

The impact of the Fajujonu judgment is evident in the very different booking pattern of Nigerian women in the early 2000s (Figure 4b), whence the representations by hospital masters and, ultimately, the 2004 Citizenship referendum. And there is evidence too of the effectiveness of the referendum in putting a stop to the practice. The number of Nigerian

mothers booking in ten or fewer days before giving birth rose from 21 in 2000 to 44 in 2001, 82 in 2002, and 110 in 2003. It was 102 in 2004, but then plunged to 30 in 2005 and only 14 in 2006. Only 19 per cent of Nigerians giving birth in the hospital in 1999-2004 notified the hospital 150 or more days before birth, but that proportion rose to 55 per cent in 2005-2009. Today the modal interval for Nigerian mothers, like that of Irish-born mothers, is 200+ days. Moreover, the number of Nigerian mothers giving birth in the hospital also fell, from an average of 424 in 2002-04 to 182 in 2005-07. Such data broadly support the claims of hospital authorities in the period leading up to the 2004 referendum, and explain why in April 2005 the master of the Rotunda was happy to claim that the practice of women arriving unbooked had 'more or less stopped'<sup>42</sup>.

The data also suggest that Nigerian women were not alone in seeking entry by this route. Comparing the distribution of booking dates before and after the referendum indicates that Russians, Romanians, and 'Other Africans' were also wise to the constitutional loophole. But Nigerian women were more adept at exploiting the constitutional loophole provided by the 1987 case than any other national group.

Nigerian immigrants differed in other ways too. In a comparative study of recent immigrants from India, China, Nigeria, and Lithuania, Alice Feldman, Mary Gilmartin, Steven Loyal, and Bettina Migge<sup>43</sup> found that Nigerians' recourse to medical care exceeded that of the other three

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<sup>42</sup> *Irish Times*, April 26 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Feldman, Gilmartin, Loyal, and Migge, *Moving On*; more generally see Fanning, *Immigration and Social Cohesion*.

nationalities by a wide margin. The Nigerians also felt most discriminated against of the four groups yet, paradoxically or not, were also most resolved to remain.

*Irish Independent* journalist Kevin Myers, moreover, was quick<sup>44</sup> to point out that the 2006 Census revealed that the labour force participation rate of Nigerian immigrants was far lower than that of other immigrant groups (see Table 3), leading him to demand:

Why are so many people, from a country to which we have no moral or legal or historical obligations, living off this state? Why are they being allowed through immigration, if they have no jobs to go to? Why are they choosing to come to Ireland, when 20 countries or more lie between their homeland and ourselves? And finally, and perhaps most important of all, why is no one else asking why? Why did no one else pick up on the immigration digest so thoughtfully provided by the CSO? Is it because we are too polite? Too timid? Too stupid? Too scared about being called racist?

Rabble-rousing stuff! But Myers overlooked the likelihood that many of the Nigerians, unlike the Poles and the Lithuanians, were not allowed to work.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, five years on, while Nigerians are still outliers as regards labour force participation and unemployment, they are far less now so than they were in 2006 (see Table 4). And the number of Nigerians in Ireland

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<sup>44</sup> Myers, 'Risible lies about immigrants no substitute for honest debate', *Irish Independent*, August 15 2008.

<sup>45</sup> 'Risible lies about immigrants no substitute for honest debate', *Irish Independent*, 15 August 2008.

remains small—about 8,000 in 2000, 16,300 in 2006, and 17,642 in 2011—and certainly much smaller than, say, the number of Irish illegals currently in the United States.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

In their attitudes to immigrants, are the Irish any different? Mr. Deasy's jibe more a century ago was that they *thought* they were different, but that this was only because the challenges they faced were different. And, ultimately, claims that one group or community is inherently more or less prejudiced or racist than another are dubious, if not dangerous. In Ireland, there is no room for complacency, and the threats and hostility endured by Nigerian and Roma immigrants today dwarf those faced by Italian and Jewish immigrants a century or so ago. At the same time, there is a role for initiatives that minimize and pre-empt friction between native and newcomer, and there is a case for seeing the 2004 Citizenship Referendum in that light. There is a case too for transparency about the facts. Research elsewhere<sup>46</sup> comparing perceptions and reality suggests that public opinion has an exaggerated and distorted impression of immigration's impact on unemployment, living standards, and crime.

Finally, Ireland has built up a reputation, not undeserved, for its

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<sup>46</sup> Gomellini and I discuss some of the Italian evidence on this in Gomellini and Ó Gráda (2012).

relatively generous foreign aid programme. Perhaps there is a case for regarding some immigration from less developed countries as a complement to foreign aid? Irish history suggests that, by and large, emigration benefited both those who left and those who remained at home. Emigrants not only relieve pressures on the domestic labour market; they also send back remittances and some return with their human capital enhanced. Insofar as the same applies to less developed economies today, foreign aid and immigration could be seen as substitutes. United Nations data underline the important role of remittances in boosting incomes; in many less developed economies today, remittances exceed both foreign aid and foreign investment (UNDP 2010). Of course, aid and immigration are imperfect substitutes, particularly when it is the relatively better off in the sending countries who benefit from both the migration and the remittances. Still, as a recent World Bank study (Mohapatra, Ratha, and Scheja 2010) argues:

Harnessing the development potential of migration and remittances by increasing the awareness of the decision makers and improving data on remittances and migration; facilitating labor mobility and recruitment across borders, while allowing for safe and affordable mechanisms for sending money back; and combating the increase of fear-based xenophobia and overregulation are some ingredients along the way towards a migration policy that benefits both migrant-sending and receiving countries.

Given that Ireland cannot absorb all those who might want to come and the latent hostility described earlier, which would-be immigrants should get preference? What kind of migration maximizes remittances; what kind promotes human capital formation in the sending country; what kind reduces inequality and poverty in the sending country most? These are hard questions, but they are surely not insoluble.

In October 2007, in one of his most extreme rants about immigration columnist Kevin Myers—Ireland's answer to Enoch Powell—warned in the *Irish Independent*:

The bridge stands unmanned as Lars Porsena's legions approach, and this time there is no Horatio. Ireland, as Ireland, is about to vanish, just as Leicester, Bradford, Luton, Rotterdam, *et cetera*, have already done. Fare thee well Enniskillen, and Erin's Green Isle.

Six years later there were no signs that Ireland had vanished, although the country had changed for the worse for other well-known reasons. And as a result, net immigration, which was a sign of the good times and which Myers implied would continue at pace indefinitely, has turned into net emigration on a considerable scale. The turnaround at its most dramatic is reflected in the number of immigrants from the EU12: from 85,300 in 2007 and 54,700 in 2008 to 10,100 in 2011 and 10,400 in 2012. As the economy continues to



stagnate and welfare regimes tighten, there is little reason to believe that this pattern will not continue.

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Table 1. Irish Attitudes to Immigration in the 2000s					
	<i>V0245</i>	<i>V0906</i>	<i>V0921</i>	<i>V0246</i>	<i>V0247</i>
<i>V0245</i>	1.000				
<i>V0906</i>	-0.064	1.000			
<i>V0921</i>	-0.179	0.406	1.000		
<i>V0246</i>	-0.140	-0.037	0.129	1.000	
<i>V0247</i>	0.270	-0.064	-0.235	-0.343	1.000
Source: INES N=3,844					

KEY to variables used in two tables above:

*v0247*: Strict limits on number of immigrants

*v0245*: Anti-traveler halting sites

*v0246*: Pro rights for asylum seekers

*V0906*: Year of birth

*V0921*: Educational level

□

Table 2. Replies to statement: 'Immigration enriches (our country) economically and culturally'			
<i>Country</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
Sweden	1	81	18
Luxembourg	2	72	25
Netherlands	3	67	30
IRELAND	10	55	37
Czech	26	23	73
Cyprus	27	23	75
Latvia	28	19	78

Source: Special Eurobarometer 380: QB9.1 (June 2012; fieldwork Dec 2011) ([http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs\\_380\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs_380_en.pdf))

<i>Table 3. Employment Status of Immigrants by Nationality in 2006, Ages 15+ only (%)</i>					
	<i>At work</i>	<i>Un-employed</i>	<i>At school</i>	<i>Home</i>	<i>Retired/ other</i>
Latvian	83	8	3	5	1
Polish	84	9	2	4	1
Lithuanian	83	8	3	5	1
Filipino	85	6	3	5	1
French	78	5	10	5	1
German	69	4	9	9	9
UK	56	7	7	13	17
USA	51	5	17	14	13
Nigerian	38	31	16	11	4
Chinese	44	7	43	5	1

Source: Census 2006, *Non-nationals Living in Ireland*

Table 4. Employment Status of Immigrants by Nationality in 2011					
<i>Nationality</i>	Population 15+ (%)			<i>LFPR</i> (%)	<i>UER</i> (%)
	<i>At work</i>	<i>Unemployed</i>	<i>Other</i>		
Latvian	63.7	20.8	15.6	84.4	24.6
Polish	69.2	18.8	12.0	88.0	21.3
Lithuanian	65.3	20.6	14.1	85.9	24.0
Filipino	73.3	9.5	17.1	82.9	11.5
French	72.6	7.9	19.5	80.5	9.8
German	63.4	7.8	28.9	71.1	10.9
UK	46.4	14.9	38.7	61.3	24.3
USA	46.1	9.5	44.3	55.7	17.2
Nigerian	41.6	26.0	32.3	67.7	38.5
Chinese	47.4	9.9	42.7	57.3	17.3

Source: 2011 Census: Table CD354

Figure 1.

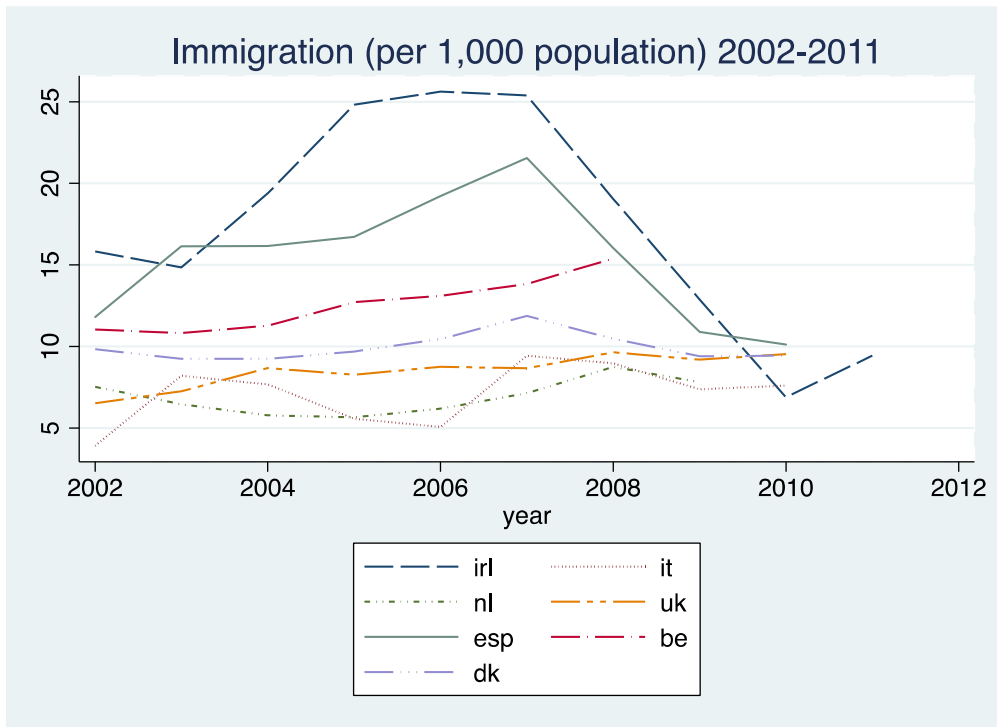




Figure 2. The Economy, Unemployment and Immigration as Key Issues, 2003-2011

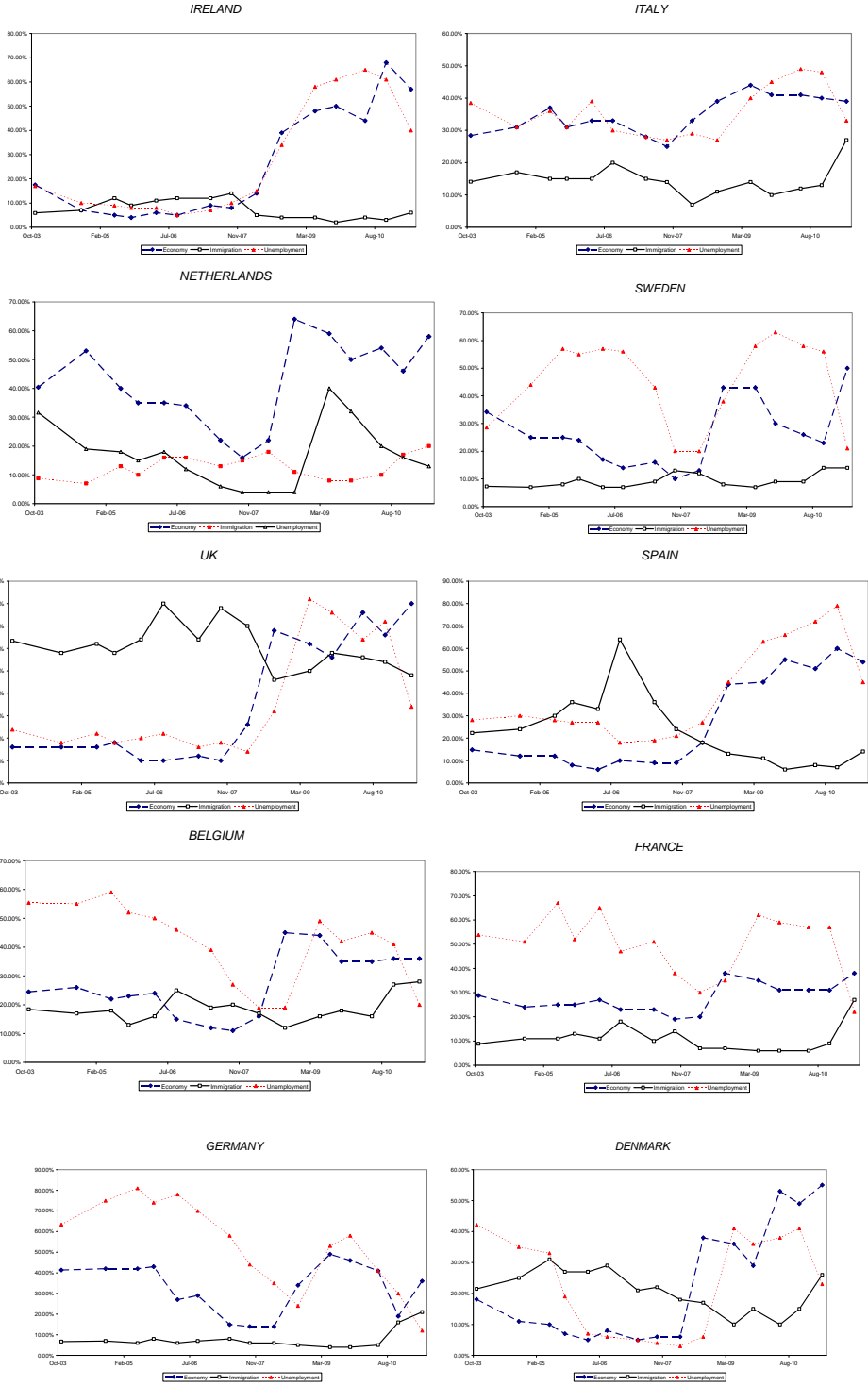


Figure 3. Immigration as a Key Issue in Selected EU Countries, 2003-2011

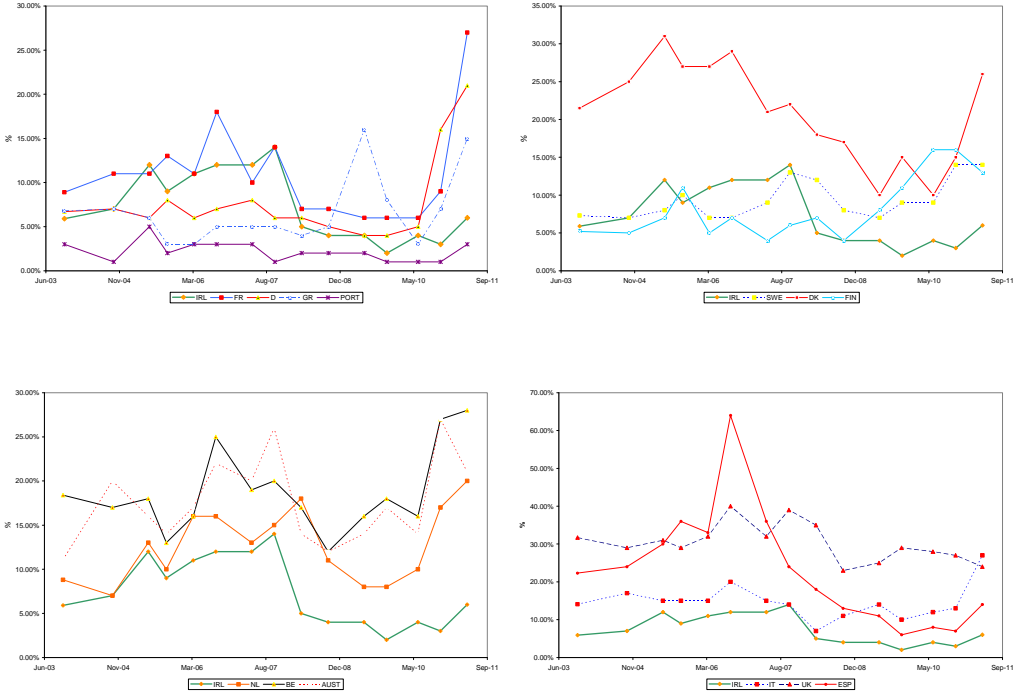


Figure 4a. Days to Birth by Nationality, 1999-2009: Irish, British, and Chinese

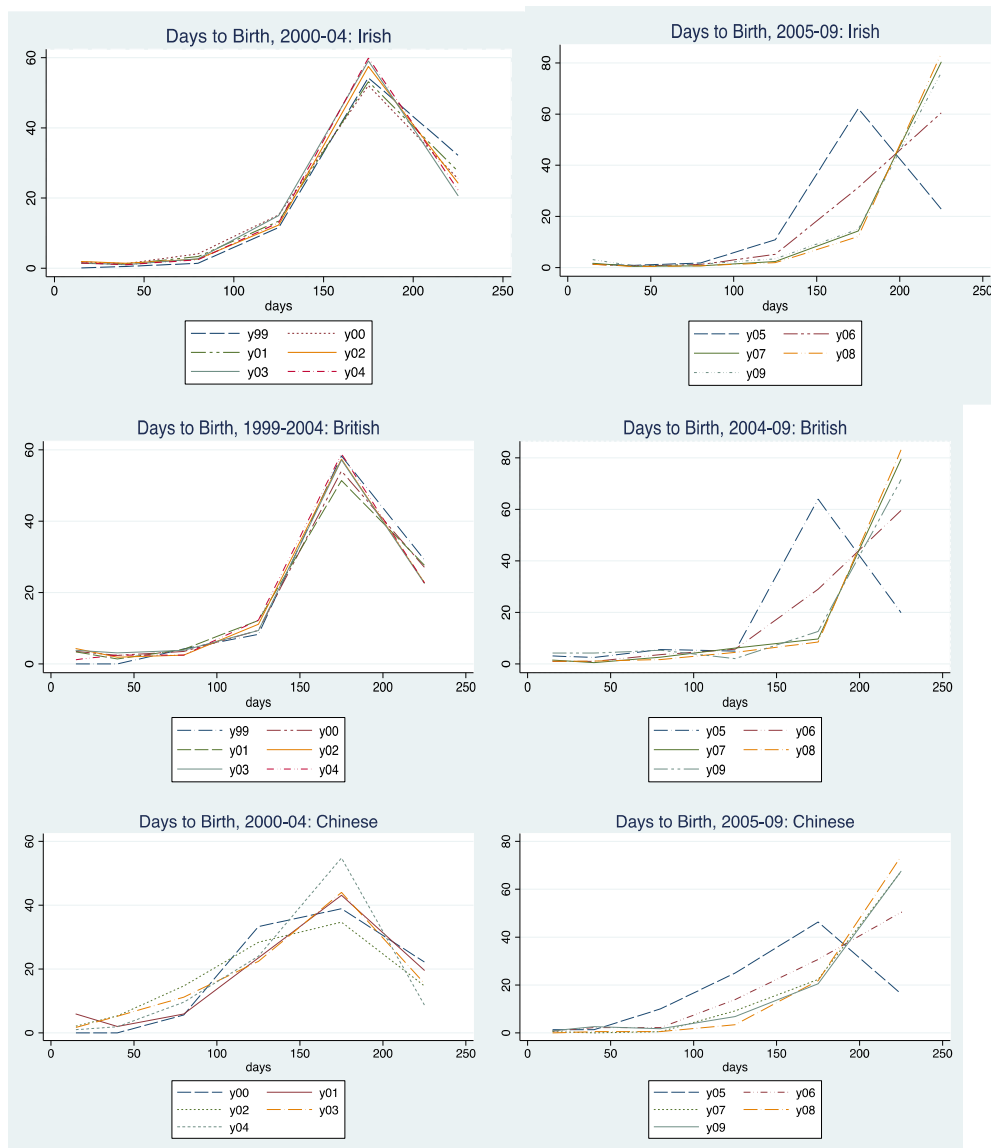
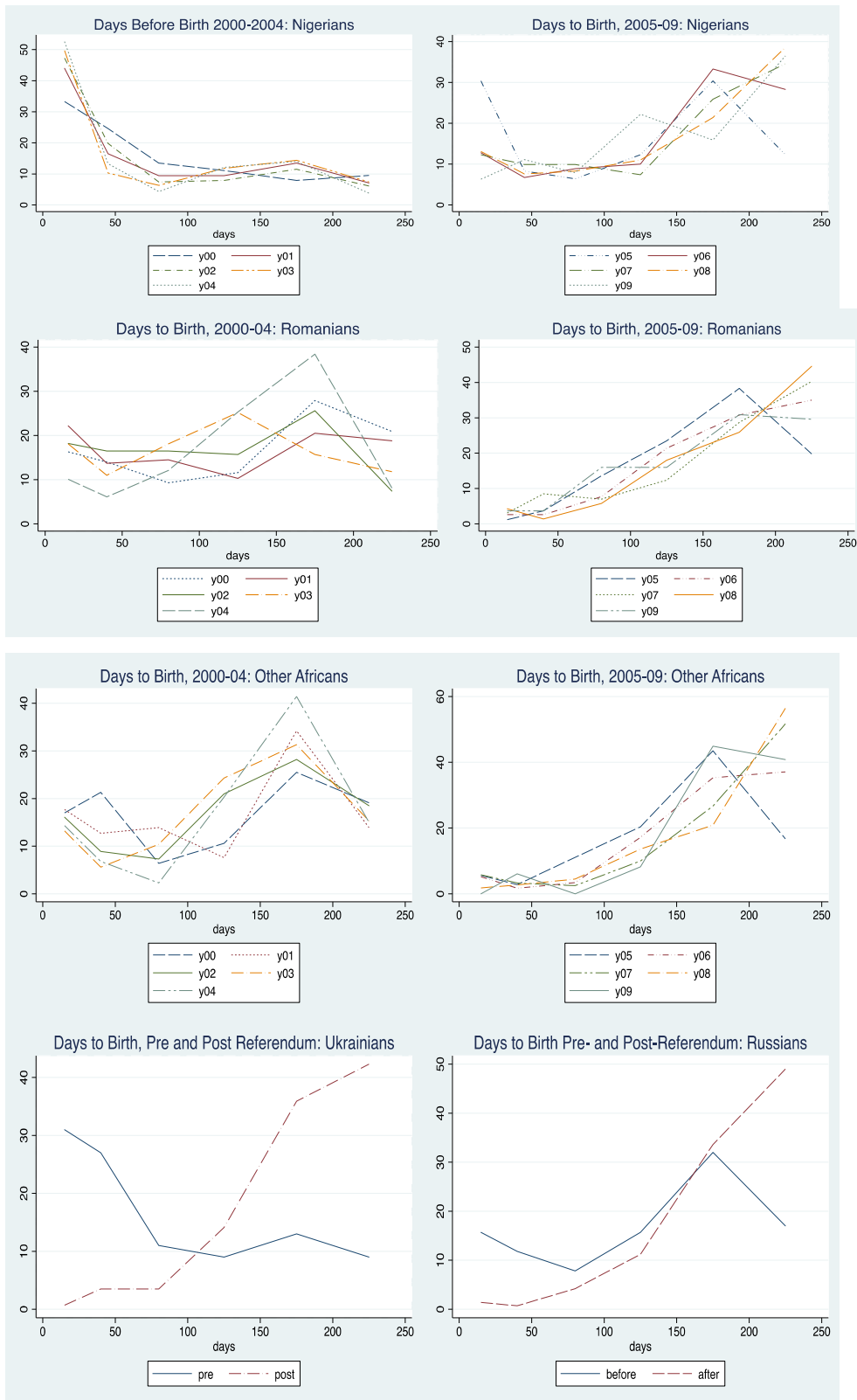


Figure 4b. Days to Birth by Nationality, 1999-2009: Nigerians and Others



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- [WP13/17](#) Olivier Bargain, Eliane El Badaoui, Prudence Kwenda, Eric Strobl and Frank Walsh: 'The Formal Sector Wage Premium and Firm Size for Self-employed Workers' October 2013
- [WP13/18](#) Kevin Denny and Cormac Ó Gráda 'Irish Attitudes to Immigration During and After the Boom' December 2013