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Counting on the 'Celtic Tiger'

Adding ethnic census categories in the Republic of Ireland

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ABSTRACT On 23 April 2006, an ethnicity question appeared for the first time on the census in the Republic of Ireland. This article analyses the evolution and addition of this question as an illustration of a specific process of state racialization in the Irish census. As such, it illuminates the social and political contestation of the meaning of race, racial categories and ethnicity in the Republic of Ireland through an examination of the interplay between demographers' needs for simple categorization and the complex lived reality of race and ethnicity in Ireland. Driven by the 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom and reversing the historic trend of Irish emigration, immigration has increased to levels not generally seen before 1996 in Ireland. The article shows how a growing diverse population of immigrants to Ireland, an increased awareness of equality legislation and a need to rationalize the statistical systems in Ireland all created a desire to enumerate ethnic groups. The article also explores how the Irish census arrived at the particular form of racial and ethnic categorization that it did – influenced by international censuses (particularly from the UK with which it shares a common travel area), the historical ethnicization of Travellers (as the article shows, there has been a long-standing debate about whether Travellers, a disadvantaged indigenous nomadic group, are considered 'ethnic' or not) and increasing awareness of ethnocultural characteristics among European statistical agencies.

KEYWORDS ethnicity ● Irish ● race ● racial/ethnic categorization ● racialization

Cornell and Hartmann (1998) build on Max Weber's idea that ethnicity has to do with:

> groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both or because of memories of colonization and migration . . . it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. (Weber in Cornell and Hartmann, 1998: 26)

Cornell and Hartmann (1998) add that ethnicity can both be ascribed by others and a resource for political mobilization within groups. They define race as:

> a group of human beings socially defined on the basis of physical characteristics. Determining which characteristics constitute the race – the selection of markers and therefore the construction of the racial category itself – is a choice human beings make. Neither markers nor categories are predetermined by any biological factors. (p. 24)

Within both social scientific studies and everyday understandings of race and ethnicity, there has been much confusion and conflation of these two concepts (Smedley, 1995; Banton, 2005). Throughout this article, I use Cornell and Hartmann's understandings of these terms to identify on the Irish census what has been called the 'racialization of ethnicity', defined as different from the 'culturalization of ethnicity' (Spickard and Daniel, 2004). Spickard and Daniel (2004) explain:

> The notion of ethnicity experienced as culture – the culturalization of ethnicity – is in important senses different from the experience that involved notions of race or geno-phenotypical and ancestral differentiation – the racialization of ethnicity. (p. 9)

Spickard and Daniel argue for the understanding of race and ethnicity not as fixed states, but as processes of racialization and culturalization.

RACIAL STATES

Several theories of racialization have targeted the state as an increasingly important and powerful site where racialization occurs. Omi and Winant, in their groundbreaking work, describe '[r]acial Formation as the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings' (1994: 62). When these racial categories are created, negotiated and embedded in the state, the state itself is inherently racial. The state doesn't just intervene in racial conflicts; it is itself the site for racial conflict.

David Theo Goldberg (2002) argues that all modern states are by definition racialized. In his book, *The Racial State*, he argues that the modern state came into being in tandem with racial ideas (both biological and later social) to define, regulate, govern and manage economically people in racial terms. The census categories would be one prime example of this racialization. However, while Goldberg is rightfully critical of racial categories, particularly ones embedded in the modern state, he does retain the idea of racial record keeping for positive actions such as trying to right past wrongs.

He writes: 'A state that is weakly racial – that may invoke racial classification in record-keeping way, with an eye to tracking historical discrimination – does not necessarily promote racist exclusions . . .' (Goldberg, 2002: 253).

Howard Winant, in his recent book *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* (2004), comments about how the state obfuscates the complex negotiations and interworkings of state racism and racialism. Winant argues:

> The state is a central player in racial matters: the modern state carries out racial classification, surveillance, and punishment of the population; it distributes resources along racial lines; it simultaneously facilitates and obstructs racial discrimination; and it is both structured and challenged by political mobilization along racial lines. (Winant, 2004: 3)

This conceptualization of the way that states behave, and how they are constituted as fundamentally racialized, puts the state in an interesting relationship to itself in racial terms. Winant argues that the state cannot be allowed to be the sole enforcer of safeguarding racial justice because it draws too much attention from the ways that states have become clever in appropriating discourses of anti-racist movements. The state then is a complex actor, fundamentally racialized, but also containing within it, possibly even through the census, the potential to obstruct racial discrimination. Race could be structured by political contestations along racial lines in response to how the state racializes groups of people and their social actions. The collection of racial/ethnic data, albeit collected on state-defined terms, is responsive to the categories and labels that groups themselves use in order to gain legitimacy within society. In this sense, the census categories could be a tool for groups outside the state to challenge institutional racism within state institutions and practices.

James and Redding (2005) critique both Goldberg, and Omi and Winant for not going far enough. Yes, states are racialized, but how? They argue that:

> . . . a focus on the internal structure, rather than the effects, of states provides a stronger theoretical explanation of how states produce and maintain race inequalities and identities. (2005: 187)

Some states may be overtly racial, but not all racial states are created equally and in the same ways, through the same processes or under the same social conditions. The differences, then, between racial states, with particular attention paid to how policies, political institutions and actors form and/or resist racial states in international and comparative context would be important. For example, Morning (2006) found that 'among 138 national census questionnaires analysed, 87 countries or 63 percent employed some form of ethnic census classification' (Morning, 2006: 4) – most in North

America, South America and Oceania – with race being used infrequently as a primary term, but more likely to appear as a secondary term in most census questions.

By understanding how the Irish state has moved to formally enumerate people by ethnicity, possibly though racialization, the Irish case illuminates part of the process of the racial state making to which James and Redding draw attention.

IRISH RACIALIZATION

Racialization, the process through which racial meanings are assigned to social phenomena, is not new to Ireland. Irishness itself has long been racialized in the USA (Ignatiev, 1995) and in the UK (Garner, 2004) and in relation to the Irish diaspora and gender (Gray, 2004). Attention has also been paid to prejudice and racism in Ireland itself (Lentin and McVeigh, 2002). There have been strong historical analyses of the role in the Irish state in racializing in the name of national identity (Fanning, 2002; Garner, 2004), but fewer studies have been conducted on the impact of newly arrived immigrants and Irish returnees (Corcoran, 2002), themselves in negotiation with the state over racial meanings. In the past decade, immigrants of non-European ancestry have entered Ireland in larger and more visible numbers, challenging existing frameworks of racial and ethnic understanding. These frameworks are being transformed through a process of social negotiation and contestation, which we can see in many state places, one being the Irish census.

On 23 April 2006, an ethnicity question appeared for the first time on the census in the Republic of Ireland.[1] The addition of an ethnicity question to the census in the Republic of Ireland is particularly interesting for three reasons:

1 The Irish census gives evidence of contemporary racialization, i.e. the Irish census is racializing, adding formal 'technologies' of the racial state at a relatively late date when compared to other countries such as the USA, which has had racial categories on the census since the 1800s (Snipp, 2003).

2 The addition of the race/ethnicity question as a formal tool of racialization on the census takes place in a unique historical context of being a postcolonial nation, with a history of 'ethnicization' of Travellers.

3 The push for formal ethnicization and racialization of the Irish populace in the census comes at a time when the state is pursuing apparently contradictory racial policies regulating citizenship (based

not on place of birth) on *ancestry*, while at the same time developing an increasing concern with equality and the rights of under-represented groups.

METHODOLOGY

The data in this paper were collected through archival research examining documents at the Central Statistics Office (CSO) (an independent statistical body that reports to the Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister)), the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) (an independent body of experts advising on antiracism), and other publicly available documents (such as the census forms themselves) and in-depth interviews with CSO officials, statisticians and policy makers from the Department of Health, Equality Authority (EA), NCCRI and an enumerator.

DEVELOPING AN 'ETHNICITY' QUESTION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE ETHNICIZATION OF TRAVELLERS

In 1996, the CSO was approached by Pavee Point (a Traveller organization) and asked to add a question on the census to identify Travellers.[2] At the eleventh hour, the CSO agreed that while it was too late to change the form of the census to include a question and that they would need more research, they would add an extra category on the front of the census form where enumerators could fill out what type of household was identified. This allowed enumerators to tick a box on the intake form of the census to indicate the type of household. Initially, of course, this was based on the enumerator's ability to identify a household as Traveller or not. And while it was more obvious in halting sites, it was less clear to enumerators trying to identify Traveller households in settled accommodations. Enumerators did not ask people if they were Travellers or not, and were not really supposed to be identifying people as Travellers or not, but instead eyeballing households, using their own judgment to determine Traveller status (Central Statistics Office, 2002). The subsequent result, a tabulation of 11,000 Travellers, was considered an undercount, recognized by both Travellers organizations and the CSO.

The momentum for adding a question was reinforced by increasing immigration and ethnic diversity in Ireland. In 2004, 14,900 immigrants were recorded coming from outside the European Union (EU), USA and UK (Central Statistics Office, 2004a). The Quarterly National Household

Survey, using a version of the 'ethnic question' later added to the census, found in 2004 a population that described themselves as: white 2,983,000; black 20,000; Asian 28,000; and other 29,000 (Central Statistics Office, 2004b).

In 1999, the CSO recognized the need for racial/ethnic enumeration and drafted and pilot tested a racial/ethnic question. The CSO placed advertisements on their website and in the major newspapers, and wrote letters to community-based organizations that they felt would be interested in putting forward submissions for the upcoming 2001–02 census. Submissions came from a wide variety of sources, for example, government departments (such as Equality, Justice and Law Reform, Foreign Affairs, the Environment), community organizations (such as Pavee Point, Combat Poverty, Focus Ireland), as well as Political Parties (Sinn Fein), Labour unions (Irish Congress of Trade Unions), local county councils and individuals, including ex-enumerators (local volunteers). In all, 75 submissions were made to the CSO, of which the majority (18 of the 75) pertained to disabilities. Second in number (7 of 75) were about race/ethnicity.

In 1999, the CSO surveyed 8000 households in a pilot survey of potential new census items collected both by mail and by enumerators, using two different forms (matrix and pages per person). They included the ethnicity question shown in Figure 1.

After examining the UK census in various jurisdictions, it was decided to add the category 'British' to the question about ethnicity in Ireland, because people born before 1949 were entitled to British citizenship and might identify themselves as such. Perhaps this was because the discussion to add the ethnicity question took place in the wake of the Irish peace process in the North (1998) and an increasing recognition of Irish people in Britain and their ethnic needs in health, education and employment (Hickman and Walter, 1997).

When the CSO asked the question above in 1999, the response rate was high – 93 percent. And while the CSO thought race/ethnicity would be a

What is your Ethnic Group?

☐ Irish

☐ Irish Traveller

☐ British

☐ Other: _____

Figure 1 Ethnicity question included in the 1999 pilot census survey in Ireland

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2000.

sensitive question and that people would not answer it, most did. It turned out, in fact, that the income question was far more sensitive, with a return rate of only 75 percent (one of the lowest) and also the 'number of children born alive' question (return rate 86%).[3] Interestingly, the live birth question and the income question were dropped at this stage by the CSO, but the ethnicity one was not. Even though there was no 'bad reaction' in the field test of the pilot, the NCCRI (with Philip Watt as Director) and the EA (Niall Crowley, Chief Executive Officer) expressed concern that the question, as worded, confused ethnicity with nationality. In other words, weren't Irish Travellers also Irish? And couldn't people be misled by the term 'British' to think that the question is asking about nationality?

In March of 2000, the CSO, rephrased the question to read as shown in Figure 2:

Q. 12 What is your Ethnic Group?

☐ White
☐ Irish Traveller
☐ Black African
☐ Chinese
☐ Other:_____

Figure 2 March 2000 revision to ethnicity question in Ireland
Source: Crowley (2003).

Niall Crowley, of the EA, then wrote back to the CSO asking them to refine the question again. He wrote:

> We feel the question could be amended slightly in order to help people identify ethnically. For example, the question as it stands would cause confusion to a Black Irish person as they are neither white nor Black African. The simple solution to this is to eliminate the African and allow a Black person to identify themselves as they wish. It may be better to pose the question as follows:
>
> ☐ What is your ethnic group?
>
> ☐ White
>
> ☐ Black
>
> ☐ Irish Traveller
>
> ☐ Chinese
>
> ☐ Other ethnic group(s) _____ (please specify)
>
> We feel a person should be allowed to tick more than one box where appropriate. (Crowley, 2003)

While the CSO agreed with the EA on self-enumeration and about removing 'African' from the term 'black', they did not agree with multiple checks and the question then went forward as shown in Figure 3.

The new question was then circulated to the government departments for feedback before a final decision was made about whether to add the question to the census or not. The Department of Education and Science expressed concern about the objective of the question and what information precisely it sought. They also had queries about the format of the question and expressed concern that the categories may be confusing or inadequate to reflect the wide variety of ethnic backgrounds in the Irish population. It isn't too surprising that educators, who deal regularly on the front line with a growing population of non-Irish national students in schools everyday, understood the scope and impact of increasing diversity of the population on schools. The Department of Health and Children expressed concern: 'given the importance of the question and sensitivities associated with the issue, they felt that great care should be taken to ensure that the question elicits meaningful responses and doesn't jeopardize overall census completion and reliability' (Central Statistics Office, 2002).

The question then moved from being about the ethnic or national identifier Irish to being 'white', which is a racial designation. There doesn't appear to be any claim being made that the CSO is trying to measure 'white' culture, hence white ethnicity, but instead the question heading 'ethnic' remained while the terms under it were changed to racial ones. White and black then become racial designators. In the move away from nationality, they suggest not cultural terms that would divorce race from ethnicity, but instead racialized ethnicity by proposing racial terms under an ethnic heading.

The reluctance to use the term 'race' came from the recognition that 'race' is not biologically determined. To use the term 'race' or 'racial labels'

Q. 12 What is your ethnic group?

☐ White

☐ Irish Traveller

☐ Black

☐ Chinese

☐ Mixed Ethnic Group, write in description _____

☐ Any other Ethnic Group, write in description _____

Figure 3 Second revision to ethnicity question in Ireland
Source: Central Statistics Office, 2003.

would just reify and perpetuate racial thinking (Ali, 2003). However, race, like gender or class, is a Durkheimian social fact (Aron, 1970: 69) and indeed socially constructed and constrained. The recognition of this social fact is evident in the approach of trying to identify 'visible minorities' through the proposed 'ethnic' questions with racial terms because it may be a possible basis of discrimination.

In 2000, the Irish government rejected the addition of the race/ethnicity question on the census as too sensitive a question and because the format submitted to government had not been pilot tested. They agreed to a question on membership in the Travelling community and a question on nationality, which solved the earlier nationality issue, but not to include race/ethnicity. While Pavee Point was happy with the addition of a question for Travellers, they were unhappy that Travellers were singled out and not included in a larger question on ethnicity, which again would have strengthened their claim to ethnic group status as a precursor to claiming rights. They wrote:

> We now urge the Government and the CSO to include a full ethnic question in the next census, such as in Northern Ireland and the UK and many other developed countries. There are an increasing number of non-national ethnic minorities and even Irish citizens who are of minority ethnic backgrounds. A question on nationality does not bring out this type of important information. (Pavee Point, 2003: 15)

The CSO agreed that the question should reflect the changing demographics of Ireland and should track the 'actual situation out there'.

PREPARING FOR CENSUS 2006 IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

In the lead up to the 2006 Irish census, the CSO in Ireland established a subgroup that studied the ethnicity question and found the question tested in 2002 to be a good starting point for the 2006 census. A consultative group was then formed in 2002 which, using a question piloted by the Traveller Health Study group in the Department of Health and adapted by the NCCRI, examined the question for its viability in the 2006 census. The group was seeking a question that would track discrimination indirectly through the use of ethnicity. Even though there was not a statutory requirement to collect ethnicity data, they felt that, by using ethnicity with nationality and other categories, the census data would allow them to better understand discrimination and legislate for equality along ethnic lines. While there was not a strict legal requirement to collect these data, there was increasing awareness of equality legislation (e.g. Equal Status Act, 2000) and, particularly, of the establishment of race and ethnicity as grounds

for discrimination in 1999. Also, in this time frame, the United Nations (UN) Commission for Europe and Eurostat agreed recommendations for each decennial census, which included an increasing discussion of ethnicity as a non-core topic, and they noted that ethnicity is also related to physical characteristics, which can be used to identify 'visible minorities'. The comments of the consultative group indicated that they wanted to establish recognition of Traveller ethnicity as well as domestic minority groups such as black Irish people as possible ways to track discrimination.

In November 2003, the CSO once again called for submissions for the 2006 census. They received 83 submissions of which eight pertained to race/ethnicity. Submissions from academics, the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (Equal Status Division), regional authorities, county councils and the National Disease Surveillance Centre all argued for the inclusion of ethnicity data to better track possible inequality along ethnic lines. In December 2003, a Census Advisory Group that consisted of representatives from eight government departments, the Taoiseach's (Prime Minister's) office, the Economic and Social Research Institute, the EA, the trade unions, employers, regional authorities, regional planners, city councils, Dublin transport and two academic experts was established to examine the submissions and make recommendations to the CSO.

The NCCRI submitted the leading proposal and the question in the 2006 census read as in Figure 4.

Even though it is not billed as a 'race' question, it does, in fact, use skin colour and meta-racial designations, but the ticks themselves are on 'ethnic' identifiers. No one has to tick black, but they can tick under black. The evolution of the categories moved away from nationality/ethnicity (i.e. the elimination of 'British') towards racial designations as white, black and the like. It created an ironic situation where the 'ethnicity' question on the census actually has meta-categories of white, black and the like, with Irish (nationality/ethnicity) added and with ethnic identifiers underneath them.

In addition, the Irish census did not make 'any other white', 'any other black' and 'any other Asian' free text fields (where you fill in the blank line yourself), which means that the categories might be very heterogeneous and of limited conceptual use. Interestingly, unlike the ethnicity question on the England/Wales census, the Irish census does not include Caribbean (under black) perhaps because of the small size of migration from the Caribbean versus the larger migration from African countries. Also, the use of Asian in the Irish census differs from the England/Wales census form, as it does not delineate Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis in the 'any other Asian' category,[4] but lumps all of those from the Indian subcontinent in with Malaysian, Filipinos, Japanese and separates them out from Chinese (the estimated largest group under this heading). This may be, again, because the size of ethnic communities from the Indian subcontinent is much smaller than the Chinese community in Ireland.

14 What is your ethnic or cultural background?
Choose ONE section from A to D, then ✔ the appropriate box.

A White
1 ☐ Irish
2 ☐ Irish Traveller
3 ☐ Any other White background

B Black or Black Irish
4 ☐ African
5 ☐ Any other Black background

C Asian or Asian Irish
6 ☐ Chinese
7 ☐ Any other Asian background

D Other, including mixed background
8 ☐ Other, write in description

Figure 4 Ethnicity question included in the 2006 census in Ireland
Source: 2006 census, with permission from the Central Statistics Office, Ireland.

By analysing the evolution of the question on the census in Ireland there are distinctive features to be seen. First is the fact that racialization in the state occurred at all. This was most clearly seen in the tightening of citizenship laws in response to what was seen in the Irish media as a 'flood' of African (read black) refugee and asylum seekers coming to Ireland in late pregnancy, giving birth in Ireland to gain citizenship (Moriarty, 2005). Second, the form that the census question took represents a complex blending of race and ethnicity. In the pilot test in 1999, the question was predominantly an 'ethnic' question with categories that represented broad cultural categories such as 'Irish' or 'British'. The categories were so broad and also overlapping with nationalities, particularly complex in the North of Ireland, that they were changed in 2000. By 2000, the question had transformed primarily through the input of the EA to a racial question with categories 'white', 'black' and 'Chinese'. By 2006, when the present question was being asked, the question had changed again into a combination of ethnic and racial meta-categories such as 'white', 'Black or Black Irish', 'Asian or Asian Irish' with subcategories underneath them of ethnicities, such as 'Irish' under white or 'African' under black.

This was a distinctive compromise of the past racialization of Irish people brought home with a desire to racialize others, often identified and acted

against based on their physical appearance, such as in the case of hate crimes. For example, in early 2006, Chinese takeaway drivers were being called to false addresses in north Dublin and then beaten up. This was tracked by the NCCRI as a racially motivated hate crime aimed at the Chinese community.

But what process led to the format of the question on the Irish Census in 2006 and what social forces created the question that ended up being the best question for the Irish racial/ethnic context? Having started with Pavee Point in 1996, 10 years later when the 2006 census was executed, Ireland had created an ethnic census question influenced by: (1) borrowing from the England/Wales and Northern Ireland ethnicity census questions; (2) the increasing politics of racialization and awareness of the equality agenda on racial/ethnic grounds; and (3) an increasing ability to mobilize international norms.

BORROWING FROM THE UK CENSUS QUESTIONS OF 2001

The development of the ethnic/racial question on the census in the Republic of Ireland has been uniquely shaped by its relationship with the UK. The historical relationship can be seen within the UK census in relation to its enumeration of Irish people in various parts of the UK with the addition of an 'Irish' category recommended and supported in the Republic (Gray, 2004; Hickman and Walter, 1997). To better understand the relationship between the Irish and the UK census in terms of racialization, I sketch a brief history here of racializations in the UK through its census and then discuss how it impacts the Irish case.

The UK added a question on country of birth on the census in 1841, and in 1971, the census became seen as a way to provide information on the size of the 'black' New Commonwealth immigrant population as well as background information on their employment and housing that could provide a baseline against which to measure the effects of the 1968 Race Relations Act.[5] This signified a shift from trying to control immigrants and immigration to a recognition of 'rights' and searching for data to help enforce rights-based laws.

It was deemed 'not feasible' to ask a direct question on race/ethnicity, so country of birth was used and the thrust behind the question was to 'identify "visible" minority groups'. This has inevitably influenced the form of the question and the output categories used (Dale and Holdsworth, 1997: 261). The main purpose of the question was to distinguish reliably all people who belong to groups that are susceptible to discrimination because of their ethnicity (Sillitoe and White, 1992, cited in Dale and Holdsworth, 1997: 161) The purpose of the question, according to the Home Affairs Committee of

the House of Commons in 1983, was: '. . . in conjunction with other indicators of general disadvantage, to assist Government and local authorities to identify and work against all aspects of racial disadvantage and racial discrimination' (HC 33–1, p. ix; as cited in Ballard, 1996: 16). Ethnicity in this interpretation was closely related with physical difference (racialized ethnicity) and clearly did not cover the experiences of 'non-visible minorities', such as the Irish and Jewish (and other) white ethnic populations in the UK.

The question tested throughout the 1980s and the final version used in 1991, but not in Northern Ireland (Dale and Marsh, 1993: 342), had a question on ethnicity, as shown in Figure 5.

There was little confusion about what the question was asking (Ballard, 1996) and in 1991, 94.4 percent of respondents ticked 'white' and the majority identified themselves in physically distinctive terms (white) – in socially recognized racial terms referring to physical appearance. By collecting data with the concept of 'visible minority' in mind, socially agreed upon understandings of race were enumerated in the question and not ethnicity.

Q. 11 Ethnic Group

Please tick the appropriate box

☐ White

☐ Black-Caribbean

☐ Black-African

☐ Black-Other: please describe _____

☐ Indian

☐ Pakistani

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Chinese

☐ Any other Ethnic Group: Please describe _____

If a person is descended from more than one ethnic or racial group, please tick the groups to which the person considers he/she belongs, or tick the 'any other ethnic group box' and describe the person's ancestry in the space provided.

Figure 5 Ethnicity question included in the 1991 census in the UK
Source: 1991 UK census, with permission from the Office of National Statistics, UK.

In 1991, the census clearly identified macro racial categories of white, black, Asian, etc., where whiteness was interestingly homogenized. There was no ethnic breakdown within the white category while black and Asian categories had ethnonational subcategories. Write-in answers that were coded 'white' were Irish, Greek (including Greek Cypriots), Turkish (including Turkish Cypriots) and Other European. Mixed white responses were recoded back to 'white'. In 1991, only an estimated 11,000 respondents gave 'Irish' as a written answer, although the country of birth information showed that there were 592,550 respondents born in Ireland and 780,479 respondents living in a household headed by an individual born in Ireland (Ballard, 1996). It was suggested that the Irish in Britain were doubtful about 'flagging their distinctiveness' in racial terms, or maybe they interpreted the question to be asking about 'race', i.e. white, but not ethnicity, i.e. 'Irish'. Within the discourse on multiculturalism, the absence of 'Irish' as a considered minority group within the British context and the particular issues raised for the Irish living in Britain in terms of health, education, and socioeconomic status (Garner, 2004) were highlighted and would resurface in the 2001 census.

Ballard writes:

> The Irish constitute by far the largest of Britain's ethnic minorities; though precise numbers are unknown, they are undoubtedly a great deal more numerous than the entire population of all the visible minorities put together. (Ballard, 1996: 24)

One of the suggestions gleaned from the 1991 experience was to add subcategories under 'white' so that people, especially the Irish, can express a white ethnicity (Walter, 1998). More importantly, the data above show that the state reflects how well the categories 'work' for people. If the question generates too many 'other' responses, they go back to the questions to redraw (or blur as in the case of the 2000 census in the USA) the racial lines (Williams, 2005). This process of categorization then depends upon civil society's compliance with racial/ethnic meanings in the form filling, but the state also responds to non-compliance with the categories as in the case of where there are too many 'other' answers.

In the UK, the 2001 revised ethnic census question took on board the above suggestions and in England and Wales appeared as in Figure 6. Subcategories were added to the white category, and Irish was enumerated in England, Scotland and Wales for the first time, but Greek and Cypriot were not. Irish enumeration was considered highly inaccurate (Hickman et al., 2005) and there was also a hierarchy of choice imposed on the Irish in the UK.

There was a forced choice between Irish and British (Aspinall, 2000a: 216), including for people who might identify as both, such as second-generation Irish born in England. Other white ethnic identities didn't get

8 What is your ethnic group?

Choose ONE section from A to E, then ✓ the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background.

A White

☐ British ☐ Irish

☐ Any other White background, *please write in*

B Mixed

☐ White and Black Caribbean

☐ White and Black African

☐ White and Asian

☐ Any other Mixed background, *please write in*

C Asian or Asian British

☐ Indian ☐ Pakistani

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Any other Asian background, *please write in*

D Black or Black British

☐ Caribbean ☐ African

☐ Any other Black background, *please write in*

E Chinese or other ethnic group

☐ Chinese

☐ Any other, *please write in*

Figure 6 Revised ethnicity question included in the 2001 census in England and Wales

Source: 2001 UK census, with permission from the Office of National Statistics, UK.

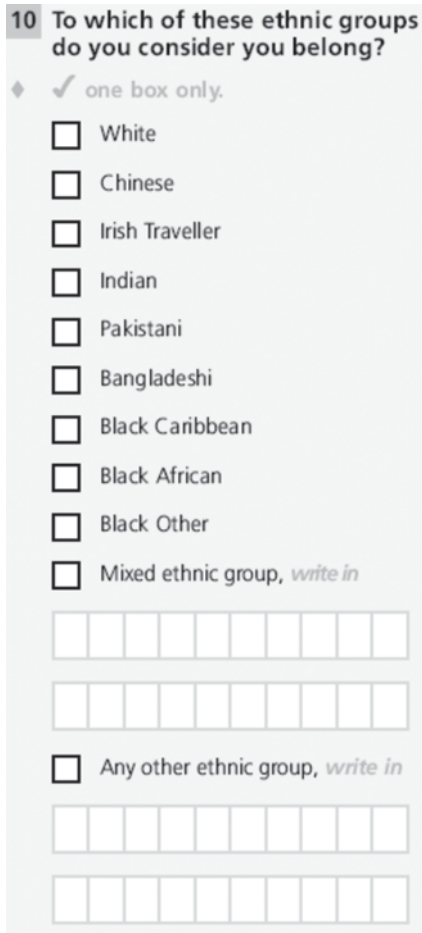
the same treatment as the Irish in terms of enumeration. There is no 'Welsh' option on the England/Wales form and the usefulness of the 'British' identifier in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland might be questioned here.

Aspinall (2000b) critiques the 2001 census question arguing that it continued to classify by colour, mixed racial/ethnic domains, mismatched between categories and self-descriptions, and lumped pan-ethnic racial groups in the output of the data. Aspinall also argues that the UK census continues to perpetuate ideas of racialized ethnicity. One is white first and Irish second, or black first and Caribbean second. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) later decided to abandon the plan to lump all ethnic groups into the five pan-ethnic groups only and used the full 16-category classification for its output.

The CSO, although an independent body as laid down in the Statistics Act of 1993, reports to the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of the Republic of Ireland. They took consultation from many experts within Ireland, but they also examined what other Anglo countries were doing in terms of the ethnicity question and were greatly influenced by the UK model. The similarities to the Irish question are clear: (1) the syntax of the question itself is quite similar – it is asking about ethnic or cultural background with forced choice between categories; (2) cultural backgrounds are embedded within pan-ethnic categories such as 'Asian'; (3) the use of 'any other background' under each pan-ethnic identifier 'Any other Asian'; (4) the incorporation of a term of national identity into pan-ethnic labels; and (5) the use of a duplex, free text box for the category 'other' are all similar in both the England/Wales and the Irish ethnicity questions.

Northern Ireland

The British/Irish dichotomy turns an even more interesting shade in Northern Ireland. In 2001, the form in Northern Ireland read appeared as in Figure 7. The wording of the question itself is different in Northern Ireland. It asks, 'To which of these Ethnic groups do you consider you belong?' as opposed to the census questions in other jurisdictions, which asked, 'what is your ethnic group?' and then asked form fillers to indicate their cultural background. This squarely puts the focus on 'belonging' and self-identity rather than static and finite group membership. It appears that there are no meta-racial categories in Northern Ireland. This is interesting in light of the fact that racism has found itself in the media in relation to the North. For example, Belfast was recently named as the most racist city in the world according to Der Speigel (Carlin, 2005: 1). However, race is still present in the Northern Irish question, as Chinese and Indian (ethnonational identifications) are mixed in with white and black (racial identifications). If we look closely at the first option, you can only be Irish


10 To which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?

✓ one box only.

- White
- Chinese
- Irish Traveller
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Black Caribbean
- Black African
- Black Other
- Mixed ethnic group, *write in*
- Any other ethnic group, *write in*

Figure 7 Ethnicity question included in the 2001 census in Northern Ireland

Source: 2001 census, Northern Ireland, with permission from the Census Office for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

if you are a Traveller in the North, otherwise you are white. The British state doesn't recognize Irishness or Britishness for that matter in Northern Ireland. Either you are white in Northern Ireland or the only way to assert Irish ethnicity is by being a Traveller, probably not a route many take to assert Irishness. You also can't be British or Scottish or any other white group in the North, such as Welsh etc. Perhaps they feel that they can gather this information through a question on religion where Britishness is linked to religion and not race/ethnicity per se. In fact, both Protestants

and Catholics in the North might find ticking 'white' easier than having to state religious preference. The effect is that whiteness is homogenized and de-ethnicized.

The Irish CSO in the Republic of Ireland carefully examined these forms when formatting their question and began the formal process of introducing an ethnicity question. These models provided an example of an 'ethnicity' question that had blended racialized ethnicity (Aspinall, 2000a; Spickard and Daniel, 2004), but at the state level. It legitimated using ethnicity to try to capture racial meanings and inequality.

The presence of the English/Welsh and Northern Irish censuses and their existing ethnicity questions gave legitimacy and provided models of racialization and ethnicization. This legitimated the question in Ireland, as the CSO used existing questions in England as a model for the question in Ireland, and the models they examined had blended race and ethnicity together conceptually.

The borrowing of the format and categories of the question and then adjusting them to the specificity of the Irish context is an example of how states may borrow ideas from one another. By seeing states as influenced by 'world society' we can see that:

> world society models shape nation-state identities, structures and behavior via worldwide cultural and associational processes, meaning that nation-states are more isomorphic than most theories would predict and change more uniformly than is commonly recognized. (Meyer et al., 1997: 173)

The cross-cultural diffusion of cultural forms, such as ethnic questions on the census, can be exchanged between rational bureaucratic states by rationalized experts with authority (statisticians and demographers). This means that the census is, of course, a reflection of local ethnic meanings, but is also cross-fertilized by worldwide ideas of ethnicity in an international context. The desire by demographers and statisticians may also drive the need for 'comparable' data and hence categories that end up looking alike.

THE IRISH CASE

However, the Irish census was not an exact replica of what had gone before in the UK. There were significant differences between the two ethnic questions on the censuses. How do we explain these differences? I argue that (1) the local context of the increasing equality agenda and legislation laid the ground for a claim to the politics of rights; (2) that this claim was occurring in a context of exclusionary racialization (in the context of citizenship law); and (3) that it was also exacerbated by the Minister for Justice's insistence that Travellers are not an 'ethnic' group.

Politics of rights

The politics of racialization in Ireland have manifested themselves both in terms of the politics of rights and of recognition. The politics of rights has been promoted by legal and institutional change (e.g. the Equal Status Act, Employment Equality Act, formation of the EA and Inspectorate), which has made racial discrimination illegal and created the mechanisms through which it can be officially challenged and compensation provided. The politics of recognition has been facilitated by the growth in civil society of a variety of organizations, media outlets and ethnic community institutions, which have formed the basis for the claiming of new racial and ethnic identities in Ireland. The Government's National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR), which will measure progress (benchmark) against racism in Ireland, would be an example of the former. The EA and NCCRI hope to gather data to provide information to monitor the changing diversity within Irish society, track inequality and discrimination, assess integration, target and allocate resources, promote awareness of cultural diversity in Ireland and more fully meet the requirements of the relevant international human rights instruments (NCCRI, 2005: 48–9).

The 'NGO Alliance Shadow Report' (NGO Alliance, 2004) would be an example of the politics of recognition at work. The report was prepared as a response to the Irish Government's First National Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) under the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, first prepared in November 2004. In the report, the first article actually addresses the same issues as the NAPAR. Responding to the CERD General Recommendation 30, paragraph 1(5) states: 'States parties should include in their periodic reports, in an appropriate form, socio-economic data on the non-citizen population within their jurisdiction, including data disaggregated by gender and national or ethnic origin' (NGO Alliance, 2004: 27).

This led the NGO alliance to target racial/ethnic data as one of their top priorities, arguing that: 'Before any government can design and implement policies to eliminate racial discrimination, it must have an accurate picture of the national or ethnic origin of its population' (NGO Alliance, 2004: 27). Drawing attention to the need for data, possible undercounts for groups such as Travellers and mixed race/dual heritage members, the report instantiates an increased awareness of a wider equality agenda. This lack of data or unreliability of data, as quoted in an NCCRI publication, is interpreted as 'an indicator of the low or uneven priority that has characterized policy responses to the needs of minority ethnic groups in Ireland . . . The availability of the appropriate quantitative and qualitative data is essential to the pursuit of equality' (National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, 2002: 18). Their recommendations are: (1) A question on

ethnicity should be included in the next census; and (2) other means of collecting data on minority ethnic groups in Ireland should be examined and implemented as a matter of urgency (NGO Alliance, 2004: 18).

The intensification of racial discourse

Elsewhere in the state there was also an intensification of exclusionary racial discourse. The census takes place in and reflects the social context in which it is conducted. With rapid in-migration continuing throughout the early 2000s in Ireland, and in the wake of the heads of the maternity hospitals claiming that refugee women arriving in late pregnancy in Ireland were 'straining' health resources and on the cusp of the accession states joining the EU in May 2004, the Irish state changed its constitution to allow citizenship to be limited to those with Irish ancestry.

The Irish state was indirectly racializing citizenship when it changed the constitution in the citizenship referendum, which became the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Bill 2004, which reads:

> Notwithstanding any other provision of this constitution, a person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, who does not have, at the time of his or her birth at least one parent who is an Irish citizen or entitled to be an Irish citizen is not entitled to Irish citizenship or nationality, unless otherwise provided by law (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2004).

The fact that the referendum passed with 80 percent support is evidence of the attitudes towards people assumed to be non-Irish nationals through racialization. The campaign for the change to citizenship rules was heavily influenced by media portrayals of 'Irish Born Children' with non-Irish national parents versus 'Irish children' – with the former racialized as undeserving of citizenship rights over the latter (Devereux and Haynes, 2006). In June 2004, the citizenship referendum in Ireland increased restrictions on 'non-nationals' and created a racialized two-tier system where *jus sanguinis*, or descent, hence *race*, becomes the basis and prime criteria for being an Irish citizen. This would give citizenship priority, for example, to third-generation Irish Americans who are possibly far removed with no connections presently at all with Ireland over 'Irish Born Children' (of colour) born and raised their entire lives in Ireland. The racial distillation of Irishness (read here as whiteness) will be purified through these policies and perpetuate obsession with rules of descent, i.e. race. The ethnic (racial) categories in the Republic of Ireland were developed within a context of increasing legal and political efforts to control immigration *and* to extend racial/ethnic rights and equality at the same time.

Crowley et al. (2006) explain how the citizenship referendum created a series of paradoxes about Irishness and Irish people as well as citizenship. They discuss how:

> (1) Ireland has always been multicultural, yet Irish society is represented as homogenous and monocultural; (2) in-migration is resisted, yet Ireland's history is dominated by emigration and it still continues to export people; (3) economic migrants invest in Ireland, but have limited benefit from such investment; (4) the Irish are both the perpetrators and victims of racism; (5) most immigrants are white, but most discourses about migration present immigrants as black; (6) policies to combat racism and promote inclusiveness co-exist with policies that promote the exclusion of asylum seekers using racist ideology. (2006: 7)

All of this was used to explain why the referendum and citizenship laws were changed to protect Ireland for the Irish and to not allow 'bogus asylum seekers' to make claims to Irish citizenship and the rights that accompany it. The citizenship change to focus on ancestry is an essentializing technique of distilling Irishness into 'race' or ancestry of common descent. Irishness by ancestry makes its nature inherent, not socially constructed and reconstructed over time. As Crowley et al. (2006) point out, this process 'fixes' Irishness into a static time and space bound definition solely based on 'blood' or ancestry – traceable through the generations.

Traveller ethnicity

Even though the citizenship issue has no direct legal impact on the census, there was an indirect potential to increase the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group through the census. While willing to racialize 'Irishness' as ancestry driven in terms of citizenship, the Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell, at the same time continued to refuse to recognize Travellers as an ethnic group, and the 2006 census question added the phrase 'or cultural background' specifically at his office's request. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr McDowell asserted in a Dáil (Irish senate) statement:

> Travellers do not constitute a distinct group from the population as a whole in terms of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin. In the preparation of equality legislation, it was considered that discrimination against Travellers would not be covered by the term, 'discrimination on the ground of race.' Therefore, a separate ground – membership in the Traveller community – on which it is unlawful to discriminate was put into equality legislation . . . The Government is not prepared to include in the report a statement that it does not believe to be true, namely that Travellers are ethnically different from the majority of Irish people. (McDowell, 2003: 1047)

This definition conflicts with definitions of Travellers by other state officials, such as Niall Crowley, director of the EA, who pointed out that Travellers were recognized as a distinct racial group in a 1997 Race Relations Order in the North. 'They are identified as having a shared history, culture and nomadism, which are ethnic identifiers', said Mr Crowley. 'And we have the Belfast agreement which speaks about an equivalence of rights (between

the North and the Republic)' (Holland, 2003). Crowley, looked to Northern Irish racial and ethnic definitions, which identified Travellers as an 'ethnic' group to which you could consider you belong (see Figure 7). However, there are important differences between the Race Relations Order in Northern Ireland (2003) and the Republic of Ireland's Equal Status Act (2000) with regard to the way that they treat the performance of public functions.[6]

In agreement with the EA, the Irish Traveller Movement defines Travellers explicitly as a unique ethnic group, and they reject Minister McDowell's statement. They write:

> the government's persistence in not recognizing Travellers as an ethnic group betrays a mindset and policy project that continues to be assimilationist. In short, if they are not a distinct community then *ipso facto* they should be treated the same as the general population and incorporated into the general Irish population and they and their needs will be invisible. (Pavee Point, 2005: 10)

They draw on the fact that 'British courts identified Irish Travellers as a racial group for the purposes of the 1997 Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order' and 'recognised in the Pat O'Leary case that Irish Travellers are an ethnic group for purposes of the Race Relations Act' (Pavee Point, 2005: 11).

There is clear disagreement about whether Travellers are a distinct ethnic/racial group or not, and this disagreement is contentious because it is seen by ethnic community-based groups as a possible resource. Any attempt to shift the racial ground or criteria for protection under equality legislation would mean a change in the understandings of race/ethnicity for the law, but also for groups as well. They were successful, and for the first time in 2002, the census asked a question 'are you a member of the Travelling Community?'

While Traveller groups were in general happy about the campaign to enumerate Travellers in 2002, as a way into gaining greater resources for Travellers, they remained committed to having a racial/ethnic question that would not single out Travellers, but enumerate them along with other racial/ethnic groups. This was not meant as a strategy to homogenize racial/ethnic groups in Ireland or to argue that they had similar status, but, instead, as a way to gain recognition as having ethnic group status as a basis to claim rights and resources for all groups. In the end, enumerating Travellers has allowed recognition of Traveller identity and unique cultural background, which gives a positive model of enumeration for other nomadic and Traveller groups in other countries.

However, the fact that the question ended up being not just an 'ethnicity' question, but one that also includes 'cultural background' has wider implications. This could have the potential to open up the question to others who claim 'cultural' identities and seek recognition, such as the 'Jedi'

response rate in religion category of the 20001 census in England and Wales. It is possible that Goths, New Age Travellers, Rastafarians, etc. could now seek recognition of their identities as 'cultural'.[7]

External international influences

Another factor worth noting is the role of international norms and institutions that support the rights and recognition agendas from outside of Ireland. NGOs have been able to appeal to the EU and UN declarations, even though they are not hard legal requirements to get a race/ethnicity question on the census. This also helps to explain why, perhaps, the Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell, is reluctant to grant Traveller's ethnicity status, as it helps to keep Travellers from availing of EU-wide protections based on ethnicity.

The international context in which Ireland operates is less important in some ways in terms of shaping the discourse around the census ethnicity question, but it is still important to consider that: (1) there are EU and UN recommendations to collect data, if possible, along racial/ethnic lines as a way to track inequality; and (2) the presence of ethnicity questions on the censuses in Northern Ireland and in the UK gave legitimacy and provided models for how Irishness has been enumerated before (King-O'Riain, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The development and implementation of the ethnicity question on the Irish Census in 2006 illustrates the process of state racialization in practice. It shows how states can borrow racial/ethnic ideas from other contexts (Britain and Northern Ireland), how they can adapt them to local contexts as influenced by the politics of rights, intensification of racial exclusion through citizenship, as well as existing struggles over who is 'ethnic' (Travellers). All of these factors in an international context illustrate that racialization of the Irish state is contested and census data is more driven by progressives in Ireland and internationally; but elsewhere the state is racializing in more regressive ways through citizenship (Crowley et al., 2006) and de-ethnicizing through the changing of language requirements (King-O'Riain, 2006). Census data is weakly racial (Goldberg, 2002) in identifying the justification of race that many in government deny. NGOs, that are typically under resourced in terms of national politics, where state and semi-public institutions are central, may be able to exert some influence by drawing on EU and UN norms.

Ireland coming from its postcolonial and some would argue, post-racialized past, is now grappling with how to account for homegrown

difference. While clearly there have been misuses of racial/ethnic data in past situations in Germany and other more recent cases in the USA of using census data to racially profile Arab Americans (Clemetson, 2004), the key question is not the presence of racial/ethnic data, but how it is defined, collected and used.

The census, as a racial tool used by the state, or possibly used against it by community-based organizations to track state racism, is focused at present on categories that are relevant to denial of rights and tackling discrimination rather than immigration control. This will be interesting to see in a postcolonial 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland that does not have the same history of race relations to overcome as in the UK or the legacy of slavery as in the USA. Ireland is shaped by its postcolonial past, its economic present and its multiracial future.

Notes

1 The question asked, 'What is your ethnic or cultural background?' but as the article illustrates, the subcategories are white, black, Asian, etc. which are understood to be 'racial' categories.
2 Travellers are an indigenous minority group in Ireland. For more information see: http://www.paveepoint.ie/pav_culture_a.html.
3 One respondent commented that, 'Question 9 (*The Live Birth Question*) is appalling. Surely it is not absolutely necessary. It must upset a lot of people' (Central Statistics Office, 2000: 8).
4 For more on this see: Aspinall (2003).
5 The 1971 Census asked about country of birth of the respondent's mother and father, but this was later dropped in 1981. The respondent's country of birth was asked both in 1971 and again in 1981. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for providing this important information.
6 For more on this, see: Equality Authority (2006: 64).
7 Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for *Ethnicities* for making this excellent point.

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