

Translocations: Migration and Social Change

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BOOK REVIEW

Fanning, Bryan (2009) *New Guests of the Irish Nation*: Irish Academic Press, 228 pages

Bryan Fanning's new book is a book in search of an argument, in three productive senses. A collection of essays written between 2001 and 2008, it presents the gradual accretion of conceptual possibilities adequate to the consequences of rapid transformative migration in the Republic of Ireland. As these conceptual resources develop over time, a more fundamental search emerges from their contours; for a situated normative project of what comes to be called 'adaptive nation-building', capable of promoting cultural recognition, future social cohesion and a political reckoning with the structural discrimination and ethnocentricism which renders non-citizens as 'guests of the nation'. Of course, you can't adapt a nation without stoking some rows, and Fanning's book is eager to call out what he sees as inadequate trajectories of critical thought and political re-imagining; the 'blithe' and mechanistic transpositions of 'racial state' theory, the lingering hubris of modernisation, the expansive insularity of Irish Studies. There is much to admire in his field of engagement, and much to disagree with in the engagements themselves.

As a document of the decade, the essays present an accumulative sense of what Fanning terms the 'administrative brutalism' (p67) of state governmentality, where, from the introduction of 'direct provision' for asylum-seekers and the progressive differentiation of welfare entitlements, citizenship comes to be seen as "...a mechanism of civic stratification, a form of inequality in which groups of people are differentiated by the legitimate claims they can make on the state" (p111). From the classificatory violence visited on migrant children to the paradox of the non-citizen Mayor of Portlaoise, Rotimi Adebari, Fanning is excellent in dissecting what he sees as the 'sabotage of an inevitable common future' (p91): administrative determinism, gradations of rights and the retrenchment of citizenship in ethno-racial terms exclude increasing amounts of people from citizenship in the political territory of Ireland. Figures such as Adebari may hint at the countervailing importance of what Ghassan Hage has called 'participatory belonging' (2003), however Fanning is clear that a central tenet of adaptive nation-building must be to address the dis-integrating disjuncture between citizenship and the actual composition of society. This is something of a gloomy prospectus; as one of the key chapters, 'Hospitality, Solidarity and Memory' documents, this architecture of exclusion was crafted at the height of the boom through cross-party populism and the implacable, integralist statism of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

An 'inevitable common future' must also be imagined, in and through competing visions

of commonality, and a central current in the book is examining the – mainly intellectual – historical resources that offer immanent possibilities of transformation. Fanning is happy to run the risks of periodisation to contend that the nation-state is entering a ‘third uncertain phase of cultural-economic nation-building’ (p179). The two preceding phases bleed into this uncertainty, and their intellectual legacies and residual energies are critiqued for how they have constituted the ambivalent context in which migrants must negotiate belonging. What he terms ‘Irish-Ireland’ thinking is itself adaptive: David McWilliams’ vision of re-populating the nation with willing diasporic subjects (patriotically compelled by the right noises in their blood) is not worthy of serious intellectual engagement, and it is precisely this that makes it necessary to do so. By teasing out the affinities between McWilliams’ shtick and the openly racist ‘if-onlys’ of *The Hibernian*, Fanning reminds us that what separates them – and similarly, it could be added, Christopher Caldwell from *The Gates of Vienna* – is merely style and cultural capital. From ‘Irish-Ireland’ to generic modernisation; the broadly individualising, urbanising processes of the latter, Fanning argues, have both created space for difference while paradoxically shaping the racialised differentiation of Travellers. In the Celtic Tiger era, ‘immigration-fuelled economic growth’ promoted the enumerative instrumentality of viewing migrants as labour market statistics, with a ‘cosy interculturalism’ lacquered on for show and tell.

The skirmishes in intellectual history and theoretical formation which pepper this book stem from a profoundly useful question; what resources exist in the history of Irish nation-building and the contemporary public sphere to counter a ‘juggernaut of anxious ethnocentrism’? In an Irish context, this involves tracing the capillaries of nationalism for proto-cosmopolitan solidarities and anti-racist possibility, most interestingly in a discussion, based on *The Republic*, of whether and how nationalism and *republicanisms* can be unravelled. In asking what a ‘revitalised Irish studies project’ could contribute on questions of migration and belonging, Fanning may be quietly marvelling at its absent presence. Irish Studies is a broad church, but this particular criticism is well-made. I am not sure that this lack of engagement is a corollary of the potential attraction for postcolonialism of a ‘proprietary claim to victimhood’ (p128) so much as the studied aversion in Irish Studies’ transatlantic economy to disruptive evidence of ‘homogenising’ globalisation.

Postcolonial theory’s epistemological commitments might usefully underpin the primacy of intellectual history here: normative ideas of the collective good oxidate unless they find immanence in the understandings and agency of the subjects of their discourse. Thus the question is not only to sift intellectual resources, but to identify - in relation to migrant activism and anti-racist solidarities - the possibilities for praxis, however broadly understood. This discussion is broached in the penultimate chapter ‘The Once and Future Nation-State’ where Fanning lays out lines of exploration for adaptive nation-building, including a theory of cultural recognition which, following Fraser and Honneth (2003), requires a deeper reckoning with redistributive questions. In rightly cautioning against highly partial narratives of western European multicultural failure, he contends that imagining a common future must start from the empirical multiculturalism of shared space, and forms of solidarity that transgress the “...developmental ideology of economic solidarity that was offered as the sole justification for Celtic-Tiger era mass immigration”

(p157).

Why these forms of solidarity are then refracted through an overlay of Robert Puttnam's theory of social capital is not clear; even in its specific context Puttnam's conceptions of social identity and interaction are inadequate, lumping all forms of difference into 'diversity' and abstracting the social from process and time. Yet as Fanning notes, mobilising energies for adapted futures comes from existing social action: "The self-integration of immigrants no less than any 'top-down' process has the potential to redefine the dominant imagined community" (p152). Puttnam cannot account for the ways in which people live in and across difference, often beyond the officially sanctioned shape of the apparent problem of difference. 'Self-integration' is rarely recognised in official fantasies of integration, and this critical gap is central to the practice of solidarity.

This review must conclude with a consideration of the book's trenchant dismissal of 'racial state' thinking. There is little room in a review to do this topic justice, and this is partly my criticism of the book's approach. For a critique bannered as "Against the 'Racial State'" and flagged on the cover as a 'provocative' take on academic analyses, a consideration of David Goldberg's work - and its adaptation by Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh - is given precisely two pages. In this limited treatment, Goldberg's work is represented as posing a 'racial state ideal-type' which is then uncritically sutured to the Irish context. The idea of the 'racial state' can only be reduced to an 'ideal type' if Goldberg's work is in turn uncritically detached; from a cumulative body of work examining the constitutive properties of 'race' in western modernity, and from what Ben Pitcher has summarised as "...the longstanding historical relationship between the political state, the ideology of nationalism, and the idea of race" (2009:27). That this unpicking takes place here is surprising, as elsewhere in the book Fanning is fluent in his examination of what Étienne Balibar has described as the 'reciprocal determination' (1991:52) of nationalism and racism in the shaping of 'Irish-Ireland'.

Fanning's criticism of Lentin and McVeigh is that "...to blithely insist that the Republic of Ireland is a racial state serves to mask a broader potential mechanics of exclusion" (p.136) and that specifically, in analysing the 2004 Citizenship Referendum, it overdetermines racism as state action by eliding societal modes of racism and ethnocentrism. It is important that - to adapt Badiou - the anti-event of the referendum receives more sustained analysis than it has to date, but at one level I am not sure that these are necessarily antagonistic positions. Fanning is right when he insists that by solely attributing the referendum outcome to racism, that 'other causes of prejudice and discrimination are ignored' (p.132). Yet it does not follow from this that the codification 'nationals/non-nationals' is evidence of 'ethnic nepotism' rather than racialisation - particularly as the constant risk with deploying ethnicity to temper 'race' is that it locates the problem of difference in the lives, practices and identities of antagonistic ethnicities, rather than in social structure, discourse and the gaze of empowered social groups.

Lentin and McVeigh do not airbrush out the complexities of this social antagonism, but rather insist on foregrounding the implications of a contemporary European state deploying the (crisis) politics of race midst the uncertainties of a wider political-economic conjuncture. This is not to conjure up a sudden re-branding of the Irish nation-state as racial, but instead to insist that anti-racist scholarship pays close attention to the particular

powers of the modern state to mobilize the threat of race. Thus the Citizenship Referendum was less radical departure and more object lesson in the power to perform the limits of national belonging, and to further structure social institutions through the rendering problematic of racialized groups. The state does not need to be conceived of as an 'all-encompassing' monolith for this critique to be made; cosy interculturalism, IDA job fairs and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal do not contradict each other.

Fanning argues that the purchase of 'the racial state' in Ireland cannot merely be assumed solely because of the institutional forms of the modern nation-state, an argument which would probably meet the approval of the postcolonial theorists discussed in other chapters. Yet there is an irony in the fact that the empirical proof which he calls for is powerfully provided by his own document of the decade: the institutional racism experienced by migrant children, social policy as an 'instrument of internal border policy' (p82), the implementation of 'harsh border policies' and the concerted undermining of asylum-seeking (pp 86-87), the legal exclusion of 'disposable people and their children' (p88), the legal and political re-racialisation of Irishness as '...a definition of twenty-first century Irish society' (p89) and, perhaps most tellingly, the centrality of race-thinking in sifting and ordering the Pope's children and guests: "The notion of the human being has become something of a category error. Somebody categorised as an asylum-seeker or a 'non-national' on a non-transferable work permit is deemed to be a sort of non-person" (p90). If the state in Ireland plays a concerted role in mobilizing, reproducing and institutionalising racialized difference, how is it not a 'racial state'?

The nature of this definitional argument illustrates a number of processes which are only marginally about definition and not at all about academic territory. As Goldberg writes more recently, race is an 'unspoken subtext' in the adaptive discourses of European politics, yet when it remains unspoken, no category is available to "...name a set of experiences that are linked...historically and symbolically, experientially and politically, to racial arrangements and engagements" (2009:154). Fanning's engagement with Lentin and McVeigh marks something of a more sustained move to work through how these arrangements, engagements and experiences should be conceptualised and opposed, and what is at stake is how the nature of the conceptualisation shapes the nature of the opposition. Nevertheless, that this dialectic divides them should not obscure a useful, unifying dimension: the desire, after the normative vacuum of the 'Celtic Tiger', to ensure that resurgent debates on the good society recognise the actual society that the nation-state presumes to administer.

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