

## Books

### ■ Diverse Republic

**Professor Bryan Fanning,**  
UCD School of Social Policy,  
Social Work and Social Justice  
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Professor Bryan Fanning's new book, *Diverse Republic*, is a timely discourse that challenges us to look closely at our behaviours and attitudes towards immigrants in today's Ireland. The opening chapters provide historical context that helps explain the political position on social cohesion and integration policies.

Ireland's early years as a sovereign state in the 20th century dealt with its own "Brexit" as the politicians chipped away at colonial economic dependence and propagated a cultural view of Ireland that grew upon ethnicity, language, and dominance by the Catholic Church.

Fanning points out that Irish nationalism was "inspired by republican ideals of equality". The 1916 Proclamation declared a Republic that would "cherish the children of the

nation equally." "This aspiration", he points out, "drew on a non-sectarian tradition of republican nationalism that could be traced back to Wolfe Tone." However, now in the 21st century, although far-right parties who dominate the political platform on racial exclusion in other countries do not have a foothold in Ireland, Fanning calls it out that they have laid "claim to the symbols and heroes of the Republic" as they appeal to potential supporters through campaign tactics supported by nativists in other countries.

Fanning writes a fascinating account on far-right perspectives operating in Ireland, focusing on individuals such as Gemma O'Doherty and John Waters as well as on parties such as The National Party and The Irish Freedom Party. Given the strategic COVID campaigns of the past twelve months, he could fill a sequel to this book.

Fanning's thought process is very clear: "Poverty and inequality are... the main drivers of social exclusion. Segregation, whether this results from economic inequality or occurs on the basis of ethnicity, is the main characteristic of poor social cohesion." He points out that the opposite – integration and social cohesion – meaningfully occur within specific localities, even if the rhetoric and arguments that characterise the politics of immigration play out at national level. He illustrates this point by recounting a tweet by Gemma O'Doherty which showed a picture of 31 Longford primary pupils and claimed "... Irish people will soon become an ethnic minority..." and the response from Longford Cricket Club who posted a team photograph of

mostly Asian-origin players.

Addressing the issue of citizenship, Fanning highlights an important distinction in public perceptions: He argues that although "to prevent somebody from voting or going to university because they were black would be an outrage" (and is covered by the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Employment Equality Act 1998), "to prevent someone from voting or from having the same entitlements to further education because they were not an Irish citizen can appear entirely reasonable."

To the problem of legal citizenship, with consequent absence of political representation, add the issue of language fluency, and both attitudes and experiences step dangerously close to exclusion and racism.

In a society where almost all residents in the country have been affected by the housing crisis and the political failure to tackle the problem, plays into the hands of nativists. Fanning points out that from a social policy perspective, integration and social inclusion overlap to a considerable extent.

"The needs of new arrivals including asylum seekers should be addressed jointly with those of long-term residents and more resources should be made available to both groups as a result of the arrival of new groups." In other words, if you tackle the problems of all of the people – such as housing – you enable social cohesion and integration of the new Irish.

Fanning concludes with a list of nine questions that a Citizens' Assembly on Ireland might consider in order to create a *Diverse Republic* for all of the people. **EO'B**