

Female Indian doctor attacked and Nigerian UCD student lost eye: Ireland's unwelcoming 1960s

Evidence of racism is taken less seriously now than during the early 1960s, writes Bryan Fanning.

DURING THE 1960s two of Nigeria's three Catholic archbishops were Irish, as were more than 60% of the priests in that country.

Irish clergy ran primary schools catering for more than half a million students, as well as overseeing 47 hospitals.

With such a significant relationship there and in other parts of Africa, it is hardly surprising that many Nigerians and other Africans came to Ireland to study.

Their experience was not always one of great welcome.

'Badly beaten outside dancehalls'

Some met with racism but complaints about this reported in Irish newspapers were mostly described as unwarranted attacks on Ireland's reputation for hospitality.

On 20 August 1964 the Irish Times reported that a Nigerian judge Mr L. Oluodun Fadipe had compiled a list of 25 incidents against 'coloured students' in Dublin, some of which had resulted in serious injury.

These included an attack on 9 November 1963 in which Patrick Udenze, a Nigerian student at University College Dublin lost an eye due to the injuries he sustained.

Other attacks targetted an Indian woman doctor, while there was an assault on an 'Indian girl' who was with an 'Irish boy', both of whom were students at Trinity and several incidents in which Nigerian students were badly beaten outside dancehalls.

'Few isolated attacks'

Following a meeting with the Nigerian Ambassador to Ireland, the Minister for External Affairs Frank Aiken, issued a strongly-worded statement expressing grave concern at "the accusations of racial prejudice against the Irish people and against the Irish police in particular, on the strength of a few isolated attacks on overseas students".

According to the Minister's statement there were some 1,200 overseas students in Ireland and he wished to assure the parents of these that they would enjoy the full protection of the authorities from "any manifestations in Ireland of the wave of youthful rowdyism which had recently become prevalent in the large industrial cities in the world".

The article failed to mention that Dublin was not such an industrial city.

The same edition of the Irish Times also published a piece on how racism affected the self-esteem of black children in the United States and claimed that this explained, in part, their apathy and the inability of American negroes to escape poverty. What such racist stereotypes had to do with the experiences of middle-class black African university students in Ireland was not addressed.

Racism taken less seriously now than the 1960s

Two nineteen year old men were arrested for the attack on Charles Fadipe but it was determined that there was insufficient evidence to proceed with the charges.

An Irish Times editorial described the Nigerian press coverage of the assaults as unbalanced and Ireland as broadly welcoming to African and Asian students.

It concluded that little could be done to make awkward landlords (a tacit admission of housing discrimination against such students) or the population in general treat coloured students with respect except through education and Christian charity.

The editorial also inferred that the attacks had something to do with 'rows over girls'. Another article published a week later quoted Vincent Browne, the vice-president of UCD's student union, as saying that a large majority of cases had not occurred in dancehalls and had not involved women.

During the last few years several reports have presented evidence that racism is part of day-to-day life for black immigrants and African Irish. Yet the Irish government has not had an anti-racism policy since 2008 since the organisation responsible for this, the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) was closed down.

For all intents and purposes, evidence of racism presented by NGOs and set out in research by academics is taken less seriously than during the early 1960s. At least those complaints were acknowledged by the then government.

*Bryan Fanning is Professor of Migration and Social Policy at University College Dublin. His new book *Migration and the Making of Ireland*, published by UCD Press will be launched in [Books Upstairs](#) on Wednesday 7 March at 6.30pm.*