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***‘Racialised from the Start' Revisiting Ireland's Citizenship Debate:   
A 20-Year Retrospective***

A symposium hosted by The Centre for Forced Migration Studies TCD and

  Black Studies, Dept. of Sociology TCD

Friday 18th October 2024

**Abstract and Biography Booklet**

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## Opening Remarks: Dr. Ebun Joseph

Dr. Ebun Joseph is a race relations consultant and Director Institute of Antiracism and Black Studies and the Special Rapporteur for racial Equality and Racism in Ireland. She developed the first module in Black Studies and critical race theory in Education at University College Dublin. Dr Joseph has a PhD in Equality Studies (2015) jointly supervised by the UCD School of Social Justice (then named) and the School of Sociology. She has an M.Ed. in Adult Guidance and Counselling from Maynooth University; an IACP accredited diploma in Professional Counselling and a B.Sc. in Microbiology from the University of Benin.

Ebun is also an author; TV panellist, Columnist for the Dublin Inquirer on race, Chairperson of African Scholars Association Ireland (AfSAI) and an equality activist. several conferences, businesses, non-profits and as Keynote.

Ebun is published and contributes regular responses on contemporary issues of race and racism in Ireland. Her recent 2020 book is titled, Racial stratification in Ireland: A Critical race theory of labour market inequality with Manchester University press. She also co-authored the book, Challenging Perceptions of Africa in Schools: Critical Approaches to Global Justice Education with Routledge in Dec, 2019.

## Panel 1: The 2004 Citizenship Referendum and Its Racial Dimensions

### Moderator: Dr. Suryapratim Roy (TCD) Presenters: Dr. Phil Mullen (TCD), Soraya Afzali (TCD), Eve Doran (TCD)

**Presentation 1  
Racialising Irishness: The 2004 Citizenship Referendum and Its Enduring Legacy  
 Dr. Phil Mullen (TCD)**

**Biography**Dr. Mullen **is** Assistant Professor of Black Studies and Deputy Director of the M.Phil in Race, Ethnicity, Conflict, Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin. She is a Trustee of the Association of Mixed Race Irish (AMRI). Dr. Mullen’s research examines the experiences of people of Irish-African descent in Ireland through various academic lenses, specifically Critical Mixed Race Studies, Black Studies, and decolonial perspectives. Her aim is to shift the understanding of Black identity in Ireland from a narrow focus on migration to a more comprehensive exploration of its sociohistorical and communal aspects.

**Abstract**  
The 2004 Irish Citizenship Referendum, framed as a response to concerns over citizenship tourism, represented a pivotal moment in the racialisation of Irish political discourse. The Fianna Fáil-Progressive Democrats coalition government positioned the referendum as a necessary amendment to align Ireland’s citizenship laws with European standards. However, beneath the official narrative lay a racialised subtext. The focus on non-EU nationals, particularly the alleged practice of giving birth in Ireland to secure citizenship, stoked fears of migrant exploitation, reinforcing anxieties about the integrity of Irish borders and national identity.

The discourse leading up to the referendum operationalised racial boundaries within the nation. Migrants, especially Black and non-EU individuals, were constructed as threats to Irishness, feeding into broader concerns about the strain on public resources. What was evident was a debate which on the surface appeared to reflect the ethnonational/neoliberal concerns voiced by the Russian economist and lecturer in Trinity College Dublin, Constantin Gurdgiev who warned that the ‘nation [will] surrender [a] vibrant merit-based society for a pond-life of refugees’ (Gurdgiev , 2004) but which rested on a firm bedrock of ‘keeping the n\*\*\*\*\*s out’ (Brannigan, 2009: 223). However much the Irish government sought to deny the claim (Tyrell, 2004), this anti-Black messaging was rendered incarnate in the hanging of a Black body in effigy from a railway bridge in Longford town just a few days before the vote took place. A bag was placed over the doll’s head, and a sign hung around its neck which read ‘N\*\*\*\*\*s go home - you’ll never be Irish’ (Bradley, 2004).

The referendum marked a shift from *jus soli* (citizenship by birthright) to *jus sanguinis* (citizenship by descent), effectively redefining Irishness through a racial lens. While this was portrayed as a legal technicality, the overwhelming support for the referendum, with 80% of voters in favour, reflected widespread racialised anxieties. Twenty years on, the referendum’s legacy persists, particularly for Black communities who continue to face scrutiny and exclusion.

**Bibliography**

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**Presentation 2  
Race, Immigration, and the 2004 Irish Citizenship Referendum: The Politics of Belonging in Contemporary Ireland  
Soraya Afzali (TCD)**  
**Biography**  
Soraya Afzali received her bachelor’s degree in Business Management from the American University of Afghanistan in 2017 and her masters in International Relations from Central European University in 2020. She is currently a PhD candidate with the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Studies in the School of Languages, Literature, and Cultural Studies at Trinity College Dublin. In her research, she focuses on the role of charismatic authority in the propagation of hate.

**Abstract**

The 2004 Irish Citizenship Referendum was more than just a legal change in citizenship law—it was   
a reflection of the broader social and political shifts taking place in Ireland, particularly concerning race, immigration, and national identity. While the referendum successfully restricted citizenship laws, it also sparked important debates about who belongs to the Irish nation and how race and migration are intertwined in these discussions. Critics continue to view it as a measure that   
implicitly targeted non-white immigrants andcomplicated Ireland’s relationship with multiculturalism. Building on these foundations the proposed paper defines race as what   
stabilizes power structures through laws and policies that subordinate certain groups of people particularly non-white immigrant communities in Ireland. It further discusses the Direct provision complexities as part of these systematic structures within the country. The paper proposes these structures as vicious cycles that are formed by the politics of hate and thus giving force to hate propagator groups as the likes of extreme far-right. While the referendum is one example of laws that subordinate and remain racist, this paper overall aims to elaborate on the broader repercussions this law has had on shaping issues of belonging, nationality, and race.

**Presentation 3  
Unveiling Black Irish Narratives: Identity formation and (non )belonging in the aftermath of the 2004 citizenship debate  
Eve Doran (TCD)**

**Biography**Eve Doran is Trinity College Dublin’s first Black Studies as a Provost awardee in the Department of Sociology. She obtained her Masters degree in Race, Education and Decolonial Thought at Leeds Beckett University, and holds a Postgraduate Certificate in Education from Manchester Metropolitan University and an Arts BA in Sociology and Studies in Psychology from University College Cork. Eve’s research interests stem from her lived experience as a Black teacher, student, and researcher. As a graduate of the 16th Annual Black Europe Summer School, Eve seeks to use her work to position blackness in Ireland within the broader context of Black European identity. Her work specifically focuses on identity formation and (non-)belonging for Black Irish young people in the Irish education system.

**Abstract**The unique positioning of Ireland within global colonial whiteness presents a compelling domain for Black diasporic study, enlightening Black Studies to the embodiment of Blackness beyond the heart of empire. Recent racial configurations in Ireland are shaped by the mutability of ‘Irishness’ and its ever-tightening physical and symbolic parameters. In 2004 the right to Irish citizenship was amended from *jus soli* (right of the soil) to *jus sanguinis* (right of the blood) by a majority referendum vote. This was a pivotal moment in contemporary constructions of ‘Irishness’, reinforcing the argument that Ireland is a ‘racist state’. From the infamous case of Olukunle Elukanlo to the recent news story of Prof John Portmann, a white American academic granted Irish citizenship from just a DNA test, the deeply rooted racism of the state is thinly veiled. Discourse surrounding the referendum fuelled a profoundly racialised and gendered moral panic by positioning migrant mothers as producing future generations of Irish citizens that would irreparably alter the imagined homogeneity of Ireland. Two decades on, second (and third-) generation Black Irish individuals, born and raised in Ireland, are often still framed as ‘newcomers’ and ‘non-nationals’ overlooking the complexity of their experiences. This paper will combine a synthesis of existing literature and autoethnography to understand the implications of racial dynamics in Ireland since the referendum, focusing specifically on Black Irish young people. Centring the referendum and its aftermath, this paper seeks to simultaneously explore Black Irishness, to question what it means to be Black in Ireland today, and Irish blackness, to continue Ireland’s contribution to Black diasporic discourse.

# Panel 2: Legal and Institutional Responses to Race and Citizenship

## Moderator: Dr.  Phil Mullen

## Presenters: Dr. Suryapratim Roy (TCD) /Dr. Shreya Atrey (Uni. of Oxford), Saymore Masaisai (TCD), Philip Jeremiah Ryan (UCD)

**Presentation 1  
Convenient Exceptions: Citizenship, Race, and Irish Constitutionalism** **Dr. Suryapratim Roy (TCD) /Dr. Shreya Atrey (Uni. of Oxford)**

**Biography**  
Suryapratim Roy is Assistant Professor, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin. He works on climate law, citizenship, and constitutionalism. He is working on a book on Constructing the Hindu State.

Shreya Atrey is Associate Professor in International Human Rights Law, Faculty of Law, University of Oxford. She works primarily on the relationship between discrimination law and racism. Her first book Intersectional Discrimination (2019) has been relied on by several courts in discrimination cases. She is currently working on her second monograph on Anti-racism as a Legal Principle.

**Abstract**

Prevailing commentary on Irish law points to a ‘referendum culture’ and a ‘collaborative constitution’ as distinct features of Irish constitutional identity. The centrality of the referendum is presented both as an explanatory tool of how Irish constitutionalism works, as well as a normatively desirable feature of a deliberative democracy. A vast majority of such commentary omits any discussion of the 2004 citizenship referendum, or of social research on racist or anti-immigrant sentiments. At best, this referendum is treated as an exception, and therefore does not disturb the core constitutonal narrative. This treatment is analogous to media discourse after the Dublin riots in 2023 – the violence was the work of ‘bad apples’; and ‘this is not us’.  
  
This paper suggests that treating the 2004 referendum as an exception obfuscates structural inquiry into the relationship between law and racism in Ireland. Rather, it should be viewed as a constitutional moment, that prompts analysis of the foundations of Irish constitutionalism and institutional practice. Specifically, it will be queried whether the referendum and other aspects of the collaborative constitution such as citizens assemblies can overcome media bias and demonstrate testimonial fairness. From a preliminary analysis, the deliberative space of such institutions appears to be characterised by epistemic injustice towards the racialised foreigner. The second aim of the paper will be to inquire whether it is desirable to restore potency to the judiciary as an institution that contests rather than collaborates. The language of rights has the potential to offer protection and tools to minorities to contest the oppression of majoritarian deliberation. By examining case law, it will be shown that the judiciary in Ireland did indeed find ways to combat racism in some instances by going against political decisions.

**Presentation 2  
Harnessing the Demographic Dividend or Disaster: Examining the Racialised Exclusion of African Asylum Seekers and Immigrants (AAI) in Ireland's Employment and Education Sectors Post-2004 Citizenship Referendum  
Saymore Masaisai (TCD)**

**Biography**  
I have been recently awarded the prestigious Australian Research Council Ph.D. Scholarship, and I am set to commence my doctoral studies in October this year as part of the Critical Perspectives on Youth project within the Centre for Research for Educational Impact (REDI) at Deakin University's School of Education, Melbourne, Australia. My forthcoming research will explore the intersectionality of LGBTQ+ youth seeking international protection in Australia, with a particular emphasis on their educational  
and employment trajectories.

I hold a Master of Education (Hons) with distinction, specializing in Education Leadership and Policy from Trinity College Dublin, under the Ireland Fellows Programme Africa. My master’s thesis critically examined the significance of educational leadership in addressing LGBTQ+-specific educational inequalities, through a comparative analysis of schools in Ireland and South Africa. Additionally, I have participated in the Research Exchange Programme for Teachers under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports,Science and Technology (MEXT) Scholarship at Tokyo Gakugei University, Japan. My research there explored the impact of governance and leadership on the implementation   
of educational reforms, comparing the education systems of Japan and Zimbabwe.

The focus of my Ph.D. research has been profoundly influenced by my engagements with African asylum seekers and immigrants during my time as an Ireland Fellow, as well as by my diverse work experiences in Ireland, where I gained insights from working in four different companies within the span of a year. These experiences have deeply informed my understanding of the complexities faced by marginalized communities in navigating educational and employment landscapes. I am genuinely intrigued by the upcoming symposium and am eager to contribute my perspectives and research insights, while engaging with fellow scholars who share similar academic interests.

**Abstract**  
This paper explores the long-term impact of the 2004 Irish Citizenship Referendum on African asylum seekers and immigrants (AAI), focusing on their employment and educational opportunities. Using the demographic dividend theoretical framework, this study investigates how the intersection of nationalism, belonging, and race has reinforced racial discrimination in Ireland's education and employment sectors.

The study addresses three research questions: First, it examines how the 2004 referendum and associated policies have affected racial discrimination in Ireland's education and employment sectors. The question analyses how nationality, belonging, and race hinder AAI's educational and career paths. Second, the paper evaluates if Ireland genuinely accommodates AAI or if citizenship and integration policies have marginalised them behind a facade of openness. Third, the study examines whether current policies support a meritocratic system that values African immigrants' skills and contribution, or whether persistent racial biases limit their opportunities, limiting the country's demographic dividend. The literature review is organised into three key thematic areas: Racialised Nationalism and Citizenship in Post- 2004 Ireland, Barriers to Employment and Education for African Immigrants in Ireland and Demographic Dividend and Racial Equity in Workforce Development.

This comprehensive desk-based research contends that the 2004 Citizenship Referendum has entrenched racial disparities in Irish society, impacting AAIs. Exclusion from meaningful educational and employment opportunities impedes their potential contributions and Ireland's ability to exploit the demographic dividend for growth. The study concludes with policy reforms for an equitable and inclusive society that recognises and embraces the contributions of all communities, regardless of race or nationality, to fully harness the demographic dividend and boost social cohesion and economic prosperity for all.

**Presentation 3**

**From Soil to Blood: Irish “Anchor Babies” and the Bureaucratisation of Family  
Philip Jeremiah Ryan (UCD)**

**Biography**  
Phil is a PhD in Inclusive Design & Creative Technology Innovation candidate based in SMARTlab, University College Dublin. He researches sociology, creative technology innovation, inclusive design, bureaucracy, user experience, trust, privacy, and migration. He holds a BA in Communications Studies from Dublin City University, Adv Dip in Immigration and Asylum Law from King’s Inns Dublin, and an MSc in Comparative Social Change awarded jointly by UCD and Trinity College Dublin.

Professionally Phil directs a consultancy business providing information and assistance in Irish immigration matters.

**Abstract**  
The paper examines the administrative responses of the Irish State to the 2004 Twenty-seventh Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland. It takes a comparative view of the removal of birthright citizenship’s effect on immigration policies, particularly family reunification, against the literature around “anchor babies” in America.

International influences such as the *Chen v Home Secretary* and *Gerardo Ruiz Zambrano v Office National de l’Emploi* judgements effect on administrative practices are placed in the context of discourse around the amendment. What is termed in America as “anchor babies” or “citizenship tourism” was a central argument for the amendment. The fundamental shift of the meaning of Irish citizenship and the racial aspects (and attempts to avoid being labelled as such) are observed.

The responses include the *Immigration Act 2004*, the 2005 founding of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), and the Irish Born Child Scheme 2005 (IBC/05) for non-EEA parents. The later, outline of policy placed in the *Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification* is used to highlight the use of “the public purse” to justify restrictions that may not be coming from those concerns.

The legacy administrative and regulatory responses to Irish Born Non-Nationals are also reviewed. The fundamental shift of jus soli to jus sanguinis increased the exclusionary aspects of Irish citizenship. Its effects on the concept of Irishness and the racial aspects of citizenship and belonging are considered.

# Panel 3: Historical ,Colonial and Linguistic Perspectives on Race in IrelandModerator: Eve Doran (TCD) Presenters: Dr. John Wilkins (TCD/IMMA),  Lylian Fotabong (MIC), Dr. Margaret Brehony (UG)

**Presentation 1   
Black Essentialism’s Impact on “Color Line”, and Irish Migration  
Dr. John Wilkins (TCD/IMMA)**

**Biography**Dr. John Wilkins identifies as U.S.-Black and Gay. Dr. Wilkins earned his B.A. from Franklin & Marshall College, in Lancaster Pennsylvania; and earned his MA in English Literature from the L’Université de Montréal, Canada. His thesis dealt with “Goddess Imagery in the Novels of Toni Morrison”. Dr. Wilkins earned his doctorate from Trinity College Dublin’s School of English where he interrogated representations of “Black Gay Male Identity in the African Diaspora”.   
  
Dr. Wilkins arrives at Trinity and IMMA as a research Fellow funded by the Irish Research Council’s Enterprise scheme. He is interrogating the relationship between the science fiction novels of author Octavia Butler and IMMA’s exhibition, Xenogenesis.

**Abstract**  
In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote the The Souls of Black Folk. By so doing, he became

the first black intellectual to theorise a positive black identity. Du Bois’s conceptualisation

of a positive black identity is meant to contradict the characterisations, after the horror of

chattel slavery, and the vilification of the U.S. black population after the U.S. Civil War as

lazy, licentious, immoral and in need of white patriarchal guidance. Du Bois’s positive black

identity is based on racially essential gifts that black people genetically bring from Africa.

These gifts are: Religiosity, Musicality, and Dance.

Importantly, Du Bois did not see racism as a phenomenon limited to the United

States. He viewed the “Color Line” as a global malaise, predicated on the binary of white

supremacy over black identity. In the Irish context and in relation to immigration, blackness

racialized and sexualized constructions of jazz music and dance in Ireland in the post-

independence era. Drawing on newspaper coverage and government debate from 1920 to

1938, Eileen Hogan in “Earthly Sensual and Devilish: sex, race, and Jazz in post-

independence Ireland” (2010) argues that the broadcasting service and the dance halls were

important sites of formation of Irish national identity. The nation-building project was

premised upon the idealization of a rural, sanitized moral landscape. In this period, fears

about the liberalization of sexual mores focused particularly on the lives of young Irish

women, whose cultural activities became a key concern of the guardians of public morality

in the new nation-state in the 1920s and 1930s. Intensive anti-jazz campaigns, led by the

Catholic elite and largely supported by the state, constructed modern music and dance as

cultural imports that threatened Irish cultural identity and the nation.

Although Hogan’s research is insightful, what she misses is the connection to the

pejorative vilification of blackness and it’s import not only to Irish white female emigration,

but the impact of how the negative construction of black identity, early on in the Irish

Nation’s history negatively impacts black migrants in its present.

**Presentation 2  
Examining Language About the Irish Citizenship Referendum: Perspectives on National Identity  
Lylian Fotabong (MIC)**

**Biography**  
Lylian is a PhD researcher in Applied Linguistics, a journalist and a part-time lecturer at Mary Immaculate College. Her research interests include corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis (discourse historical analysis), focusing on media language, race, racism, xeno-racism, ethnicism, identity, and discrimination. Her works aim to uncover complex discrimination patterns and emancipatory practices that bring about activist solution-oriented frameworks to the problem-oriented academic movement.

**Abstract**The media and Government's language choices during the Irish Citizenship Referendumintensified and institutionalised hostility, racism, and discrimination, particularly againstnon-Irish and non-White Europeans, under the guise of protecting national identity. Thispaper employs a critical problem-oriented approach, integrating methods from corpuslinguistics, critical discourse analysis, and the discourse-historical approach to revealhow language contributes to social power imbalances, injustice, and systemicdiscrimination. The analysis draws on concordance lines from the Irish CitizenshipReferendum and Irish Born Child debates, using data from the Irish News Corpus (INC), aself-compiled 3.9-million-word collection of articles regarding Africans in The IrishIndependent and The Irish Times between 1998 and 2018. The findings underscore thelong-lasting impacts of the referendum’s rhetoric, and emphasise the need for action to

address and eliminate discrimination based on birthplace, gender, race, religion, age, or

social class for a more equitable society.

**Presentation 3:**

**“Racialised from the Past”: Historical perspectives on the slow violence of race-making  
Dr. Margaret Brehony (UG)**

**Biography:**   
Dr Margaret Brehonyis a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Research Fellow at the University of Galway and Concordia University, Montreal. She directs the [Cuba-Ireland Digital Archive](https://exhibitions.library.universityofgalway.ie/s/cuba-ireland/page/cuba) and is co-editor with Nuala Finnegan of *Irlanda y Cuba: Historias Entretejidas / Ireland and Cuba: Entangled Histories*, Boloña, (Havana: 2019). [Margaret.brehony@gmail.com](mailto:Margaret.brehony@gmail.com)

**Abstract**  
Cuba-Ireland Digital Archive is a digital humanities (DH) project hosted at the University of Galway concerned with the entangled relations between Irish and African peoples during the colonial period in Cuba. Drawing on this digital repository of endangered and rare sources from Cuban archives, the project analyses social networks to illuminate relations across unfreedom and freedom, race and class; gender and kinship. The geographical reach is global linking Ireland, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe.

Using Irish surnames as search terms, when conceptualised as markers of human property, they open up histories of people of African origin that are submerged in colonial narratives of gender and slavery. Mindful of colonial sources where “racial classifications and colonial divisions of humanity are naturalised,” (Lowe 2015) the project ‘reassembles and remixes’ the archive to enable a decolonial reading of narratives rooted in the asymmetrical and violent power relations of Atlantic slavery. By examining Black and white histories together in segregated church and secular records, Irish surnames persist across generations of families of African origin due to the heritability of enslavement through the maternal line. This leads us to confront unacknowledged connections between Irish migrants and people of African descent whose presence and humanity have been eclipsed in the colonial records of Irish slave owners in the Caribbean. By adopting a decolonised DH and a feminist critique of epistemic violence I argue that generations of Irish slave-owning families contributed to the slow-violence of discursive and ideological race-making in the Hispanic Caribbean.

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# Closing Remarks: Dr. Jennifer Okeke

Dr. Jennifer Okeke is the Anti-Trafficking Coordinator with the Immigrant Council of Ireland and Chairperson of the National Women Council of Ireland  (NWCI). She is a community activist and former chairperson of a migrant women’s organisation based in Ireland. Jennifer is a board member of the European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW) and has extensive knowledge and expertise on issues of GBV, anti-trafficking, human rights and migration (refugees, asylum seekers, direct provision). She has a proven history of supporting local migrant communities in the promotion of integration.

Jennifer was recently awarded a PhD from Dublin City University, and her research was on the experience of African migrant women trafficked into/through Ireland for sexual exploitation. She holds a Master's in International Relations, from the School of Law and Government, DCU and a BSC from University College Birmingham

**Thank you all**

**for your**

**contribution and participation!**