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Project Ireland 2040:
The Freedom of Movement in Ireland's Future Vision of Itself

In June 2018, Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar stated that migration was "an EU problem…that we all need to work together on."[1] Varadkar continued by saying that Ireland would play its role in the EU "burden sharing" of migrant arrival and transfer.[2] Then, he described a series of development initiatives in "African countries," implying that EU collaboration and "burden sharing" would disincentivize South – North movement to Europe. Varadkar's commentary echoes early migration theories and presents migration to Europe as a "problem to be solved."[3] However, in February 2018, just four months previously, Varadkar's government announced Project Ireland 2040 (PI 2040), a strategic planning framework that presents migration as a positive facet of the country's future. This essay examines the freedom of movement and its place within the future story of Ireland and broader narratives of Europe.

As the third decade of the 21st century dawns, countries around the world grapple with questions of (im)mobility and the freedom to move. Both inside of Europe's increasingly securitized borders, as well as outside of those borders, such questions have grown increasingly salient over the past decade. The 2015 'refugee crisis' and European resistance to migration sparked international conversation about the reception of migrants.[4] Meanwhile, the resurgence of alt-right political movements has pushed anti-migrant sentiments to the forefront of political discussion. The freedom of movement continues to be a defining facet

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[1] Murray, S. & J. Downing (2018)
[2] Ibid.
[3] For more on 20th century theories on migration, see: Lee, E. (1966); and Castles, S., H.d. Haas, & M.J. Miller. (2014)
[4] Baerwaldt, N. (2018)

of life for EU citizens. However, it has grown into an elusive and restricted privilege for those living outside the boundaries of the Union.

By using Ireland and its new strategic plan, Project Ireland 2040, as a focal point, this paper will explore how the Irish Government prioritizes the freedom of movement within the narrative of its future, yet simultaneously builds narratives of exclusion for those who seek to move. First, this paper will briefly contextualize the idea of movement and its place within recent European stories of crisis. Then, it will engage specifically with Project Ireland 2040 and the use of movement and migration in the plan. Finally, it will reflect upon the role of movement in the future of Europe and the stories we tell. Given limited scope, this paper engages briefly with the stated topics and seeks to spark conversation rather than to provide an exhaustive examination of the topics discussed.

I.   The 'Freedom' of Movement in Stories of Europe

While many Europeans cite the freedom of movement as an essential part of their experience of the European Union, most EU countries have increasingly restricted regulations for the movement of non-EU nationals. Since the 1992 ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, the freedom of movement has dramatically changed everyday realities for EU citizens. The ability to cross borders with little more than an identity card has notably impacted opportunities to study, work, and live in different cultural, linguistic, and geographic regions.[5] For 'insiders,' internal EU borders represent little more than a road-sign or electronic gate. Meanwhile however, for 'outsiders' who lack membership in the EU, the freedom to move into and within the EU has been regulated, restricted, or prohibited entirely.

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[5] For the official definition of free movement in the EU, see: European Commission: "Free movement – EU nationals."

For those who lack a particular passport, such borders can signify impermeability, danger, and risk. For individuals who live at the peripheries of Europe, whether geographically, culturally, or politically, the freedom of movement is becoming ever more elusive. Borders signify not only a proverbial line in the sand, but an insurmountable physical, political, cultural, and ideological barrier.

Throughout 2015 and 2016, the years in which Europe's 'refugee crisis' dominated the media, the idea of movement and the freedom to move came under strict scrutiny. During these years, over 900,000 individuals sought international protection in Europe.[6] While EU citizens continued to move freely and openly within the Union, thousands of individuals who sought such freedom confronted a far less 'free' reality. Whereas many people frame these years as a crisis of migrant arrival, others argue that the 'refugee crisis' is more adequately represented as a crisis of European governance.[7] The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) failed to evenly distribute and support asylum seekers across Europe.[8] In doing so, member states failed to embody the principle of solidarity upon which CEAS and many aspects of the European Union are built.[9] This lack of collaborative governance rendered the freedom of movement into and within the EU impossible for those who sought protection within it.

As populist political parties and decisions like Brexit threaten the decades-long project of the European Union, restrictions on key tenets such as the freedom of movement appear alarming, given historical narratives of Europe. As migration and the right of non-EU nationals to move becomes an increasingly polemically contested topic, the idea of 'Fortress Europe' has returned. Historically, the term referred to the geographic area under the control of Nazi-Germany. Contemporarily, 'Fortress Europe' has re-emerged to refer to Europe's

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[6] Spindler, W. (2019).
[7] Arnold, S., C. Ryan, & E. Quinn (2018); Thym, D. (2016); Tsourdi, E. (2017)
[8] Tsourdi, E. (2017: 668) Thym, D. (2016: 1545)
[9] Tsourdi, E. (2017: 668) Thym, D. (2016: 1545)

increasingly securitized borders.[10] Parties like Germany's Alternative für Deutschland and France's Rassemblement National seek to fortify the boundaries of the EU, suggesting that some Europeans wish to remove or rewrite the role of the freedom to move within Europe's story.[11] The 2016 creation of Frontex, the EU's external border force, and the continual securitization of European borders physically solidifies such sentiments and concretely restricts movement both into and within the EU. Europe's history tells a complex narrative of political borderlands in Berlin, Belfast, and across the continent. As restrictions on the freedom of movement continue to increase, this narrative may once again grow complicated and create widespread political, social, and economic consequences for the European project in the coming decades.

II.   A Vision of the Future: Project Ireland 2040

"Project Ireland 2040 emphasises social outcomes and values ahead of economic targets. It prioritises the wellbeing of all of our people, wherever they live and whatever their background...The objective of Project Ireland 2040 is to provide a comprehensive social, economic and cultural infrastructure for all our people to flourish, so that together we can create a better society."[12]

The extract above summarizes the goals of Project Ireland 2040, a strategic planning framework that aims to address a projected population increase in the country.[13] While numerous European leaders have proposed restrictive immigration plans, PI 2040 tells a different story for the future of Ireland. Comprised of three publicly available documents,

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[10] Malik, K. (2018)
[11] For more on Frontex and the securitization of Europe's borders, see: Andersson, R. (2014).
[12] Government of Ireland [GOI] (2018a)
[13] Government of Ireland [GOI] (2018b)

Project Ireland 2040 paints a positive and open narrative of migration. This section explores

how PI 2040 engages with the idea of the freedom of movement and migration in the future

of Ireland.

An Emigration Nation

As an island nation at the Northern periphery of Europe, Ireland tells a unique story of

human movement. Emigration played a key role in the Irish psyche throughout its history as a

nation.[14] Although not the first instance of emigration from Ireland, the exodus of people

during the Great Famine in the 1840s had a profound and sustained declining effect on the

population.[15] Excluding periods of return migration in the 1970s and 1980s, emigration

defined the country throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.[16] In the late 1990s and early 2000s

however, Ireland's story changed as it experienced net immigration for the first time in

1996.[17] The country's swift economic growth during its 'Celtic Tiger' period and the

mobility associated with the 2004 accession of new EU member states drove this change.

Despite this shift, the economic crisis of 2008 quickly extinguished any promise of

sustained immigration. Ireland plunged into a period of high unemployment and subsequent

government-imposed austerity.[18] Given post-crisis tensions, the state introduced a

multicultural, and later intercultural, agenda that attempted to actively include those who had

immigrated, many of whom were non-White and non-ethnically Irish.[19] Contextually, PI

2040 is temporally situated within this intercultural 'New Ireland' that has survived the

economic crisis and is looking to a future with demographic change.

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[14] Hughes, G., F. McGinnity, P. O'Connell & E. Quinn, (2007)
[15] Ó Gráda, C. & K.H. O'Rourke (1996)
[16] Hughes, G. et. al., (2007); Kenny, C. (2010); Quinn, G. & Q. Ó Maoláin (2002)
[17] Quinn, G. & Q. Ó Maoláin. (2002: 221) See also: Kenny, C. (2010); and Ruhs, M. & E. Quinn, E. (2009)
[18] McGinnity, F. & Kingston, G. (2017).
[19] McIvor, C. (2011)

Released on February 16, 2018, PI 2040 rests on the premise that "by 2040 the population of Ireland is expected to grow by over 1 million" over the current population of 4.8 million.[20] Whereas many countries within the EU are expected to suffer population declines, Ireland's population is expected to rise due to increased life expectancy and the levels of immigration.[21] Most notably, net migration as a percent of the population is expected to rise significantly, suggesting that migration will play a key role in the demographic change of Ireland. [22] The plan, authored by government representatives, emerged as part of the "Programme for a Partnership Government" launched after the February 2016 elections, which produced a fragmented government and the need for coalition-based policy.[23]

The language used in the documents often invokes an imaginary intercultural society that will be diverse and inclusive, however it fails to address *who* the policy seeks to include and *why* they need inclusion. For a country with a relatively homogenous population prior to the 1990s, this is striking. The three PI 2040 documents reference unity, diversity, and connectivity in their construction of an imagined future, evoking positive images of physical and economic mobility. Meanwhile, however, there is a notable absence of language that specifically refers to the freedom of movement and right to migrate to Ireland. This absence effectively obscures who the newcomers are and the essential role of freedom of movement of non-EU nationals in the projected demographic change.

For example, in the extract above from "Building Ireland's Future," the shortest and most accessible document, authors state that the plan "prioritises the wellbeing of *all* of our people, *wherever* they live and *whatever their background.*"[24] The authors make no specific

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[20] Government of Ireland [GOI] (2018c)
[21] European Commission [EC] (2015); see also: European Environment Agency [EEA] (2016)
[22] Ibid.
[23] Government of Ireland [GOI] (2016); see also: Little, C. (2017); and Loyal, S. (2003)
[24] Government of Ireland [GOI] (2018a)

reference to (im)migrants, however their reference to different backgrounds immediately causes a reader to assume that they are referencing non-Irish or non-EU nationals. The PI 2040 website states that, "there will be more people, who will be more diverse...[and] migration will shape how the population grows and changes."[25] However, within the collective 282 pages of the documents, the words immigrant and migrant never appear; the word emigration appears twice; the word migration appears four times; and the word immigration appears only once. The freedom of movement is thus an indispensable, yet discursively invisible idea within PI 2040.

Disconnections

The imaginary intercultural society presented in Project Ireland 2040 stands in stark contrast to the Irish Government's actions and the public commentary of the country's leaders. In the only section that specifically references immigration, PI 2040 authors state that, "Ongoing investment is required by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service over the next 5-to-10-year period…to protect the security of the State."[26] Contrary to the tone of the rest of the document, which emotes openness and 'diversity,' the tone of this section explicitly evokes images of boundedness and restriction. This is just one example of the ways in which the Irish government promotes a rhetoric of inclusion and mobility, seemingly promoting the freedom of movement to both EU and non-EU nationals alike. Meanwhile however, the country retains exclusionary practices in regards to the free movement of new migrants.[27]

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Government of Ireland [GOI] (2018d: 96)
[27] For more on this idea in Latvia, see Dzenovska, D. (2018)

Beyond rhetorical contradictions, PI 2040 does not account for the country's most controversial and criticized aspect of movement: Direct Provision. Ireland's asylee reception system, known as Direct Provision, emerged in April 2000 after a rise in asylum applications in the late 1990s.[28] Through contracts with private individuals, the Government repurposes unused spaces, often in isolated rural areas, to house asylum seekers while their status is evaluated. Although they are not required to live in Direct Provision, the majority of international protection applicants do so, given lengthy asylum application process, a lack of connections in Ireland, and an overwhelming housing shortage in the country.[29] The system has received extensive criticism for human rights abuses, private profit from humanitarian challenges, and ineffective reception of asylum seekers.[30] It paints a particularly 'unfree' narrative for those who move to seek protection and freedom within Ireland.

These stark contradictions between the story of movement that the Irish Government tells rhetorically its practice render narratives of free movement complicated. Discursively, movement is an inevitable and positive reality. Practically, it is a threat that must be controlled. Within the context of Ireland, and increasingly throughout the EU, certain people are afforded certain kinds of movement. The 'freedom' of movement becomes a privilege of the few, rather than a right of the many.

III.   The Future of Movement: Europe and the "Rest" of the World

In its language, Project Ireland 2040 provides a model for forward-looking proposals that integrate broader notions of free movement, diversity, and inclusion into the narrative of Europe and its future. As countries within and without the EU reckon with questions of

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[28] Banks, E. (2018)
[29] Reception and Integration Agency [RIA] (2017)
[30] O'Brien, C. (2014a); Banks, E. (2018: 7)

migration, inclusion, and movement, ideas like those of PI 2040 provide an imaginary future

that engages with migration, rather than ignores or condemns it. However, PI 2040 engages

with this future in word only and it fails to address it in practice. Mired in idealistic visions of

the future, the authors fail to acknowledge the complex realities of Ireland's contemporary

story. Furthermore, the authors continue to construct immigrants as 'others' and frame

migrant reception through a lens of assimilation.[31] Given Ireland's infamous Direct Provision

system, which physically and socially separates asylum seekers from movement in wider

society, PI 2040 has demonstrated little practical value in terms of the freedom of movement

in Ireland.[32]

As countries within the EU continue to look inward while casting a restrictive eye

outward, broader questions remain about mobility outside of the European context. Although

the rhetoric in both the journalistic and academic spheres often focuses on the Global North,

as this paper does, the highest proportions of global migration take place within the Global

South.[33] From 2005 to 2010, over 227,000 people moved from Western Africa to Western

Europe. Meanwhile, during the same time period, over 1 million people migrated *within*

Western Africa.[34] This divide alone reveals that many political systems, practitioners, and

scholars in the Global North continue to function in a mindset of "the West and the rest," a

limiting perspective that warrants acknowledgement.[35]

As of November 6, 2019, almost two years after the release of PI 2040, Taoiseach

Leo Varadkar continues to promote a positive narrative of movement and its benefits. In a

speech with the Immigrant Council of Ireland, Varadkar emphatically stated that "migration

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[31] Garcés-Mascareñas, B. & Penninx, R. (2016: 3); Alba, R.D. (2017: 7); Bommes, M. (2012)
[32] Henderson, N. (2019)
[33] Bakewell, O. (2009)
[34] Abel, G. J. & Sander, N. (2014)
[35] Ferguson, N., (2011)

is a good thing for our diversity our society."[36] Meanwhile however, many Irish citizens

continue to oppose migration into the country, and many Europeans continue to view

migration as "more of a problem than an opportunity."[37] The European Commission's

September 2019 announcement of a Commissioner for the "Protection of Our European Way

of Life" exemplifies these sentiments.[38] A Commissioner named as such implies

exclusionary processes to determine those who fit the "way of life" and those who do not.

PI 2040 and similar ideas spark a number of important questions about the freedom to

move and the story of Europe. How will the freedom to move be governed, promoted, or

restricted in coming years? In a transnational world, will the concept of the nation-state

continue to be the lens through which we understand the freedom of movement? Will

movement continue to define stories of Europe as a positive and forward-looking principle?

Or will darker realities of movement overshadow its positive benefits? Is the freedom to

move a fundamental human right? Should it be? The European Union has entered a period of

skepticism that threatens to dismantle the very unity that defines it. As this skepticism grows,

I argue that questions about the freedoms that have fundamentally shaped the Union will be

fundamental to its preservation.

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[36] Doyle, K. (2019)

[37] Doyle, K (2019); Alba, R.D. and Foner, N. (2017: 2)

[38] Rankin, J. (2019)

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