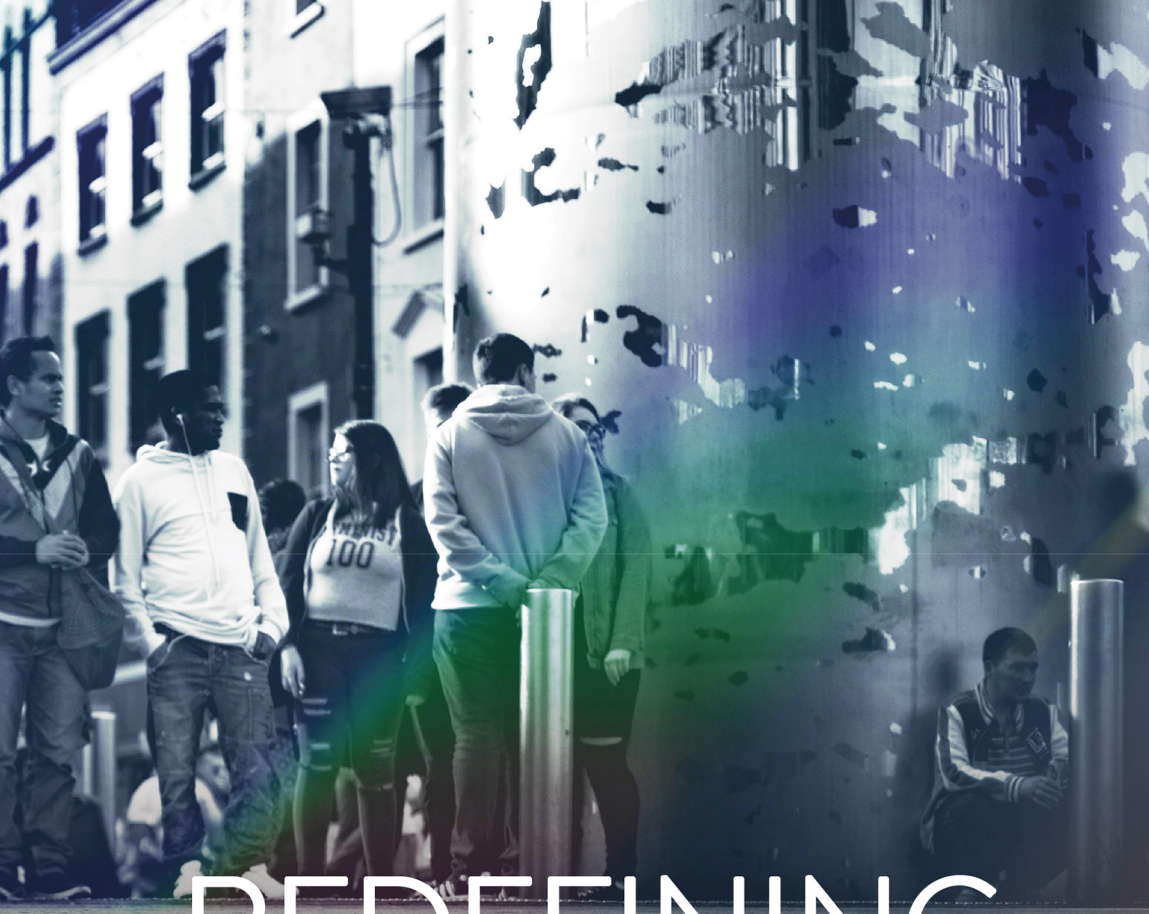

REDEFINING IRISHNESS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

National Identity and European Integration

Yaqoub BouAynaya

Redefining *Irishness* in a Globalized World

This ground-breaking book draws on an innovative qualitative audio–visual approach to elicit information from people residing in Ireland what it means to be Irish in the 21st century given the rapidly changing nature of Irish society, in part, due to migration and globalisation. One of the key thought-provoking findings is the centrality of essentialist notions of race in the social construction of Irishness. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in identity formation, socio-psychological theorization of identity and nationhood in Europe and beyond.

—***Daniel Faas***, **Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland**

This book cuts through the usual fluff about national identities being constructed and fluid, recognizing the gravitational pull of a bureaucratic regression to something less savoury. Remarkably, it does this while retaining a much-needed optimism that is grounded in a deeply felt ethical sensibility. Wonderful!

—***Andrew Finlay***, **Lecturer in Sociology, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland**

Yaqoub BouAynaya wonderfully captures the hard questions of the global challenges experienced as complex national(istic) internal divisions, while providing alternative frameworks of analysis in a rapidly changing Ireland. He very successfully avoids the clichés attached to the cultural wars, offering nuanced insights into the ways in which the dominant group in Ireland are making sense of contemporary Ireland and Irishness. We get a real sense of the processes, the mechanics, by which identity is redefined in Ireland across regions within the continuum of an ever-changing society. Drawing upon multi-disciplinary theoretical perspectives, diverse empirical work and an original qualitative methodology design of audio–visual production, the book will appeal to the widest audience, including those interested in Irish studies and more broadly questions of identity making in national contexts. Yaqoub BouAynaya is a highly skilled writer, who is able to communicate complex ideas in a simple language that is a joy to read.

—***Professor Mairtin Mac an Ghaill***, **Newman University Birmingham, England**

Redefining *Irishness* in a Globalized World: National Identity and European Integration

BY

YAQOUB BOUAYNAYA

United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

For TakiTora, Frances and Mary
peace & love

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About the Author

Yaqoub BouAynaya is a Lecturer in Sociology at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), County Dublin, Ireland. Yaqoub is a Visual Sociologist whose topics of interest intersect identity studies, racial and ethnic studies, eco-sociology, equality and social justice.

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Abstract

This book explores perceived *Irishness* and to what extent identity in Ireland is redefined within the continuum of an ever-changing society. It examines how values associated with identity affect the ways in which individuals participate in their perceived social reality, are perceived by 'others' and are re/presented between the collective local, national, European and global levels. Thus, this study considers the evolution and maintenance of nationalism and relates this to the development of the postcolonial Irish nation state within the context of European governance and globalization.

The methodology takes a multistage approach that seeks to explore individuals' perceived sense of identity, either in stability or flux, by exposure to variations of *Irishness* through the viewing of a multimedia presentation. This novel and innovative qualitative design relies on an audio–visual production made from one-to-one interviews with four individuals of differing backgrounds but who are all Irish citizens. By showing it to eight focus groups, the ambition is to elicit in participants the deconstruction of 'Irish' national identity. Through focus group discussions on identity, ethnicity and citizenship, evidence emerges from the transcribed and thematically analysed conversations.

Consequently, in exploring the processes of socially constructing *Irishness*, this research facilitates insight into the processes which affect an individual's self-understanding and social categorization. Such a reflexive social investigation reveals findings that substantiate an identity theory positing explicit contradictions between individuals' reliance on deep-rooted and inherent notions of *Irishness* in contrast with awareness and a contemporary understanding of identity as being constructed through social experience.

Furthermore, through empirical validation, it postulates the socio-psychological process of *perceived rational pragmatism* as the means by which individuals within *ordo-liberal* liquid modernity perceive of themselves as rational liberated beings. Through reflection, theory synthesis and the embedded agential design, this study informs the reconceptualization of contemporary 'Irish' identity. Its admissions seek to expedite an alternative re-imagination of, 'what it means to be Irish' so as to better complement the aspirations towards an egalitarian-based socio-democracy.

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Foreword

Professor David Theo Goldberg

Over the past four decades, globalization has placed pressure on conventional formations and understandings of nation-states and national identities inherited from the past. Capital's global reach sought to soften, if not eradicate, the state's restrictions and controls of capital's movements. This, in turn, troubled states' management of their borders as goods, services, human and financial capital were moved legally and illicitly across borders, in and out of states, in search of resources, opportunities, lower costs, profits and better lives. As Etienne Balibar showed already in the early 1990s, this had the impact of both globalizing national identity and hyper-localizing racial insistence.

'Irish' identity has long been fashioned by pressures within and beyond Ireland itself. In 1850, the then young French surgeon, anatomist and inveterate measurer of skulls, Paul Broca, distinguished between the Irish and English 'races'. At more or less the same time, Thomas Carlyle famously identified Black Jamaicans with Irish 'needlewomen', in ways meant to disparage both. By later that century in both England and the US Irish migrants, in the wake of the potato famine, were being widely characterized as 'a lower race', and, indeed, as 'black'. These characterizations stretched back from both countries to include references to inhabitants of Ireland as well. So, national identities morph as a result of pressures internal and external to the boundaries of state.

Yaqoub BouAynaya's *Redefining* Irishness *in a Globalized World: National Identity and European Integration* addresses the more recent transformations in 'Irishness' within the Irish nation-state as a result of forces and influences both within and outside the state boundaries. As the modern-day Irish economy flourished, it attracted a significant up-tick in labour from near and afar. Ireland's membership in the European Union gave European workers easier access. Like the European birthrate more generally, Ireland's birthrate had declined over the previous three or four decades, and its labour needs likewise opened opportunities to those further afield. The result of push–pull forces led to an influx of migrants from around the world, drawn in by and seeking better opportunities for themselves and their families. These demographic shifts, in turn, have prompted first small and now, as BouAynaya makes clear, more ready pressures on Irish national identity to transform. The result is both a revealing empirical study and a careful sustained analysis of all the possible theoretical accounts for these shifts. The book as a consequence speaks compellingly both to the ways *Irishness* has transformed as a result and how best to think about changes in ethnonational identity more broadly.

BouAynaya is concerned in the book to show how contesting elements in the society are shaped into a frame of interactive and, in an extended sense, shared understanding of *Irishness*. These elements may include conceptions that at present are incomprehensible, considered by consummate 'insiders' even derogatory and unacceptable in current terms of understanding. They transform with time and changing social conditions into features that fashion a new, or newly valued, sense of ethnonational identification. And, in turn, they reorder imperatives of social inclusion and exclusion, refusal and strategic acceptance. BouAynaya is especially concerned to show how to read the fluidities of ethnoracial diversity, their social regulation, remaking and reordering in our current times and conditions.

Ethnonational configuration, in the analysis on offer, is fuelled by the interactive threading of family kinship and lineage, in both the immediate and broader familial senses, and their perceived relation to claimed clan and community connections.

These senses reinforce and are reinforced by a projected understanding of 'nativeness'. This involves the fusing of nativity and the long history of presence, establishing a claim to antique belonging which, in turn, undergirds a hierarchy of 'real' ethnonationals, of those who have ethnonational identity and those who are merely – because new(er) – national citizens. These differentiations quickly come to acquire and be invested with a naturalized – which is also to say a more or less explicit racially asserted – set of meanings and commitments. The force of these formations and their affiliated understandings, in turn, delimit the fluidity of identities as experienced in late modern times. They offer relatedly a contrived and restrictive sense of belonging at a time coming and going and coming again has assumed the lived reality of the world we inhabit. This set of sensibilities in effect evidences a reach for the artifice of conservation, of fixing the supposedly given in place, self-elevating those taking themselves to be 'local', to a greater or lesser degree across the *longue duree*, over the more recently arrived, the coming and – maybe the readily – going.

BouAynaya astutely characterizes those so readily self-elevating as engaging in a process of what he calls a mode of *perceived rational pragmatism*. This can be read as akin to the claim to a local 'common sense' in addressing the shifting terrain of those understanding themselves to be properly belonging and not, the constitutive insiders and perennial outsiders or excluded.

Redefining Irishness, then, critically navigates the driving socio-theoretical literature concerning ethnoracial composition. The book addresses the principal determinants and their contemporary applicability to understanding *Irishness*, and ethnonational identification more broadly. In this, BouAynaya gives us a more generalized critical social vocabulary for comprehending the readily shifting conditions of our times.

Irishness, accordingly, is revealing because, in many ways, exemplary of both the processes and lived impacts of ethnonationalisms more generally. Every ethnonationalism, of course, has unique conditions, prompts, manifestations and elaborations. Yet, they share causes and common grounds of their emergence and growth in given conjunctures. They forge commonalities in their relational

interactions, drawing on modes of thinking, adopting and adapting expressions from other places while giving them their own twist. Yaqoub BouAynaya's book, thus, provides a terrifically evocative reading of the applicability of the contemporary literature to the case of *Irishness* while offering us novel insights into how *Irishness* models insights into the workings of ethnonationalisms more generally.