Is the Irish State Racist?

Memet Uludag

For revolutionary Marxists, there is an inextricable link between racism and capitalism. Capitalism is dependent on racism as both a source of profiteering, but more importantly as a means to divide and rule. Racism is necessary to drive a wedge between workers who otherwise have everything in common and every reason to ally and organize together, but who are perpetually driven apart to the benefit of the ruling class.[1]

The term racism refers to prejudice and discrimination against people on the grounds of their real or presumed ethnic origin. The main form of racism in the modern world has been, and remains today, 'White' European and North American racism against 'people of colour' such as Africans, Asians, Native Americans ('Indians') Arabs, Iranians, Polynesians etc. and their descendants. Sometimes, like today, this racism has also extended to certain Europeans such as the Polish, Bulgarians and Romanians and, there have been times, especially in Britain, when there was strong racism against the Irish. The focus of this article is state and institutional racism, this is because of the nature of the capitalist state is a more complex and therefore more difficult to expose and confront. It can be the most powerful form of racism as it can enable all other forms of racism to find ideological and political arguments to justify their racist acts.

From the beginnings of modern capitalist states; along with various state and national institutions, emerged the practical implementations and the ever developing complex policies of institutional/state racism. In the Irish Centre for Human Rights and National University of Ireland, Galway report *BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: Tackling racism in Ireland at the level of the State and its institu-* *tions* the lack of political attention and understanding of state/institutional racism is described as follows:

> Direct racism and overt expressions of racism have dominated the debate on racism in Ireland in recent years. Racially motivated attacks and discrimination occurring in pubs, buses, restaurants and accommodation are apparent in the reports from the Gardaí and the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism. These attitudes and behaviours of the individuals who perpetrate the behaviour are, conceptually, what many regard as racism. The idea of examining racism as being state engineered or institutional is less accepted.[2]

Today, there is hardly any state or government in the world that will openly declare itself and its institutions as racist. Indeed many states have signed up to various regional and international agreements and treaties, such as various United Nations and European Union (EU) treaties whose focus is to eliminate racial discrimination. However, around the world, and especially in Western Europe, state/institutional racism today is more evident than ever. Especially within the EU institutional racism is taking the form of a joint, multi-state policy centrally imposed via EU level policies and practices.

State/institutional racism is indeed the most complicated and difficult form of racism to expose and confront because, unlike racist gangs on the streets, or the actions of racist political groups, it is not always easy to

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[1]Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, 'Race, Class and Marxism', *Socialist Worker*, 2011

[2]Louise Beirne and Dr Vinodh Jaich, *Breaking Down Barriers: Tackling Racism in Ireland at the level of the State and its institutions.* Irish Centre for Human Rights, National University of Ireland, Galway

recognise. State/institutional racism does not carry flags decorated with symbols of hatred. It cannot be banned; a state won't introduce laws against itself. Its own police force won't arrest and lock it behind bars in its own prisons. It is not easy to physically confront on the streets and smash. You cannot sit down with it and try to change its mind by putting forward reasonable arguments against racism. Why? Simply put, because it is not a group of human beings but a multi-dimensional system. What is more, you cannot ignore it by turning your back and walking away from it. It is not delivered by a simple-single act but as a process of complex, intermingled procedures affecting different aspects of peoples' everyday lives. As Ronit Lentin argues: 'Yes people can be individually racist, but by and large the issue is the state, because the state is the only body that has the power to actually exclude and include in racial terms [...]'.[3]

In the EU and the wider Western Europe, states have initiated various national campaigns and introduced various anti-discrimination laws but the issue of state/institutional racism has not gone away. Today, state/institutional racism has been proven to exist at various levels and in various forms in social and political life of nations. As socialists we must recognise state/institutional racism in every aspect of social, political and economic life to successfully identify its causes - the capitalist system and the state - and build our fight against it.

Legalising racism - Racism in Legislation

This involves the introduction of laws and legislation that discriminate against certain sections of the society or minority groups. One of the most significant examples of legislative racism being introduced into Ireland was in 2004. The Citizenship Referendum changed the progressive and non-ethnic constitutional right to Irish citizenship for babies born in Ireland with a nationality and ethnicity based racist law. With the changes, children born on the island of Ireland to parents who were both non-nationals would no longer have a constitutional right to citizenship of the Republic of Ireland.

Before the changes, Kieran Allen argued 'the citizenship and the rights that go with it [were] bestowed on anyone who is born in [Ireland]... But Justice Minister Michael McDowell [had] discovered a 'problem'. He [claimed] it gives foreign mothers an incentive to give birth here, causing crisis in maternity hospitals. Like a tabloid editor, he [had] coined a new phrase - 'citizenship tourism"[4]

In various countries such as Denmark, France, Belgium and Switzerland, governments have introduced - or attempted to introduce - various legal bans on burqa and niqab that Muslim women wear. Although there were no social or political problems caused by a tiny minority of women wearing the burqa or the niqab these governments made every effort to change the laws.[5]

In many countries, non-citizens have little or no basic political rights, such as the right to vote or to be an elected representative. In Ireland non-citizen residents are entitled to vote in local elections but they have no say in electing members of the Dáil - the Irish Parliament - who will legislate in the areas of immigration, migrant workers, citizenship etc. The Irish state 'legally' excludes non-Irish / non-EU minorities from having their say in national elections while these very same people have all the same economic duties and legal responsibilities as the Irish citizens.

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[3]Ronit Lentin, http://theliveregister.tv/blog/ireland-a-racist-state

[4]Kieran Allen, *Citizenship and Racism: The Case Against McDowell's Referendum.* Bookmarks Ireland, 2004

[5]Memet Uludag, 'School banned a Muslim girl from wearing the hijab' 2013, http://minordetailsnews.net

Delivering racist services - Racism in Executive and State Bodies

Racism and discrimination exists in various institutions and public services such as the police, health service, education system and various other public/national institutions. In Ireland, in many schools and hospitals, the cultural, lingual and religious needs of minorities (who are often the non-Irish, non-Catholic people) are not catered for. In hospitals, patients who will undergo operations are offered Catholic spiritual services but for a Muslim patient to demand such a service would be impossible. According to a report from the Integration Centre 'Almost 90 percent of [Ireland's] 3,300 primary schools are Catholic and, while migrants are not all non-Catholic, religion is the only grounds which schools can legally use to discriminate when it comes to enrolment.' The Integration Centre wants equality law changed so that schools with high demand for places can no longer give preference to children of a particular faith or refuse to admit a child on religious grounds. It said there is a trend of immigrant children going to certain schools and white Irish attending others.[6]

In Ireland, in 2013, the forceful removal of Roma children from their families exposed the collective, deep roots of bigotry, prejudice and racism in various state institutions, namely the HSE child services, the Gardaí and the legal system. From the beginning there was an assumption made by the state institutions and the authorities involved in the case, that the children were not the biological children of the Roma parents. The actions following this racial profiling exposed deep racism in some of Ireland's key state institutions. There was no crime, no evidence of child abuse but because the 'suspects' were Roma people and because the social services and the 'law enforcement' had a manufactured racial profile of Roma people, hair and eye colour was enough to remove the children from their biological families.

Racism in the Courts and Legal System

There is widespread evidence of prejudice, disbelief and disproportionate conviction in courts and racially biased rulings by powerful judicial authorities as well as failure to deal with hate crimes. Seeking asylum is not a criminal act yet many asylum seekers report that they are treated like criminals. The socialist Paul D'Amato argues that under capitalism we are encouraged to see crime as something quite simple. He writes: 'Laws are made so that society can function smoothly. Steal or kill, and you are punished; disobey these laws, and you pay a price. This superficial view fails to explain some glaring contradictions in the law and its application, or the social context in which crime is defined. As Rosa Luxemburg once wrote, bourgeois justice is 'like a net, which allowed the voracious sharks to escape, while the little sardines were caught.' Laws and the violation of those laws (crime) reflect the interests of the dominant class - both what is defined as crime, and how the law, which gives the appearance of fairness, is applied in practice.'[7]

The class nature of the criminal justice system is evident in every prison in every country: There are no rich people in Mountjoy prison. In the United States the class nature of the racist capitalist system is particularly obvious. The US puts more of its population behind bars than any other country in the world. 'But the number of incarcerated African Americans is the scandal within this scandal'. In 2009 there were just under 2.3 million people in prison and more than 900,000 of them were Black (that is 40 percent, or more than three times the percentage of African Americans in the population as a

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[6]'Faith-based schools may 'fuel racism' ' `http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/faith-based-schools-may-fuel-racism-224489.html`

[7]Paul D'Amato, 'Crime and punishment under capitalism.' `http://socialistworker.org/2010/08/05/capital-crime-and-punishment`

whole)[8]

An editorial in the US socialistworker.org powerfully described the nature of the racial State in the US:

> The U.S. justice system is a machine that victimizes Blacks, especially young Black men. According to The Sentencing Project, African Americans, who are 13 percent of the population and 14 percent of drug users, according to surveys, account for 37 percent of the people arrested for drug charges and 56 percent of those serving time in state prisons for drug offenses. As a result of these disparities, the federal government calculated that the odds of a Black male born in 2001 going to prison during their lifetime was one in three–compared to a one-in-17 chance for a white male.'[9]

The Irish criminal justice system is also deeply racist. In Ireland, judges claim to face a 'difficult task' in asylum cases and complain that [they] are faced with resolving two conflicting public policy options. But they are not shy of expressing a political choice as per the states position on asylum cases and deportations as a 'legal' fact. Judge Gerald Hogan remarked: 'We must not lose sight that there has to be, regrettably, a system of deportation if you are going to have an asylum system.' Hogan also admitted that judges were asked 'to adjudicate on stories from countries where they barely know what the capital is.'[10] Surely it would not be a very difficult task for judges who are given the responsibility and the unlimited authority in asylum cases to find out about the capital cities of the countries the asylum seekers are coming from. That would be the least they can do in delivering a 'just' verdict.

Hogan's claim reminds us of the findings of the Irish Refugee Council report *Difficult to Believe: the assessment of asylum claims in Ireland*[11]. The report found that the refugee application process takes many years with an extremely high percentage of rejection at the first instance and that 'over a third [of the asylum seekers] have been in this system [refugee application process] for more than three years'. Waiting periods 'of seven or eight years are not unheard of' and 'it is unsurprising that anxiety, depression and ill health are widespread.'[12]

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) is the key state agency for refugee applications. In the official mission statement its role is defined as: 'to investigate applications from persons seeking a declaration for refugee status and to issue appropriate recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality'. In other words, it is ORAC that decides whether an asylum seeker will be granted the refugee status or not. Refused applicants can refer their cases to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal and ultimately to the courts. But the Irish Refugee Council's report raises serious issues regarding the extremely low levels of acceptance by ORAC and the racist, disbelieving and the dismissive attitude of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal towards the asylum seekers. Sue Conlan, the CEO of the Irish Refugee Council said, 'What disturbs me about our findings is the fact that many people who appear to have legitimate claims appear not to be receiving a fair examination of their claim and are as a result being

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[8]Editorial. 'We have to win justice for Trayvon'. `http://socialistworker.org/2012/03/21/we-have-to-win-justice-for-trayvon`

[9]ibid.

[10] Judges face 'difficult task' in asylum cases, *The Irish Times*, `http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/judges-face-difficult-task-in-asylum-cases-1.1661085`

[11]'Difficult to Believe: the assessment of asylum claims in Ireland' Irish Refugee Council `http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie`

[12]Gavan Titley, 'Asylum seekers in Ireland languish in the Magdalene laundries of our time'. `www.guardian.co.uk`

denied protection.'

The 'culture of disbelief' among tribunal members is a direct result of institutionalized racism. Claiming refugee status in any country is not an illegal act, and the burden should not be only on the asylum seeker to prove his/her circumstances to the state. The Irish state, as the facts and figures show, has a pre-determined mind-set about the refugee applicants. The 'culture of disbelief' is not something that the asylum seekers should have to - or even can - deal with so that they can get a fair process and a just decision. While, on one hand, the state claims to have a well-defined and managed process in place, on the other hand, the actual decisions, which have real consequences for people's lives, are made based on the beliefs of 'powerful' and unquestionable people. This is exactly where the racism in legal institutions lies.

Yet for some figures in the legal business the refugee application process can be a lucrative source of income. Journalist Jim Cusack of the Irish Independent reports that in the past five years barrister Sinead McGrath, who happens to be the wife of former Fianna Fail minister Barry Andrew, received €1,140,832, from the Attorney General's office to fight asylum applications. Some of the other sums paid to various barristers fighting asylum cases over the past five years are as follows: Husband-wife team Emily Farrell and Daniel Donnelly €3 million, Siobhan Stack: €2,346,064, Sara Moorhead: €2,090,043. The total payment to just 5 individuals is over €8.5 million.[13]

In 2008, Barry Andrews was appointed as the Minister of State for Children. He lost his seat in 2011 and became the CEO of GOAL in 2012. Between 2008 and 2012, during most of which Andrews was a government minister, the Irish government has fought a hard and viscous battle against asylum seekers. What we have here is a cosy situation between the government, the legal system and the private businesses of legal practitioners. On one side we have a former minister who was part of the FF government's asylum/refugee policies that forced so many asylum seekers having to bring their cases to the courts, and on the other side we have his wife who earned huge sums from these cases. And in all of this, it is we, ordinary people, who paid the ministerial salaries and the huge legal bills of their partners. This is truly a case of profiteering from an institutionally racist and extremely discriminatory asylum system. This is a million Euro earned to get some people deported back to misery they had run away from, while the hubby pretends to work for people.

Racism in Immigration and Asylum Policies

At both a national and a European level, the implementation of immigration control policies and the general lack of care and duty towards asylum seekers and migrants mean that creation of a culture of discrimination against migrant workers and the creation of inhumane living conditions for asylum seekers. Anti-immigrant racism serves the ruling class of society very well. It provides a very convenient scapegoat on which to blame all the problems of society, thus diverting and deflecting working class anger away from themselves and at the same time it is part of a strategy of divide and rule setting one section of the working class against another. The idea that we must limit immigration is widely accepted, including by many people who would definitely not consider themselves to be racist. The case for immigration control is based on the assumption that immigrants are, in one way or another, a 'problem' for the host country. There are two ways in which immigrants can be seen as a problem: in terms of their numbers or in terms of who they are.

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[13]Memet Uludag, 'For some the state is a lucrative family business; making millions in keeping asylum seekers out' `http://minordetailsnews.net/article/some-state-lucrative-family-business-making-millions-keeping-asylum-seekers-out`

Members of Anti-Racist Network protesting in Dublin

Without exception every state implements a form of immigration controls. However at times of economic crises or serious domestic political turmoil this subject is brought up and used as a distraction from the real issues. A sense of critical urgency and panic is injected into to the public minds to stop the 'floods' of migrants coming from abroad. This 'urgent need to implement immigration control measures' is a strategy of well-choreographed political hysteria developed by the political rulers. For example, in 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel in her address to young members of Christian Democratic Union party said: 'German multiculturalism has utterly failed The idea of people from different cultural backgrounds living happily 'side by side' did not work The education of unemployed Germans should take priority over recruiting workers from abroad'[14] Merkel clearly ignored the fact that migrant workers had been in Germany since 1950s, invited in by the German state to work in mines and factories, and, what is more, she neglected to mention that Germany never had a national, inclusive, well defined policy on integration of migrants to begin with.

In Britain, 'wide-ranging measures to tackle 'illegal' immigration and restrict foreigners' access to health services are at the heart of the Government's legislative agenda for the coming year (2014), which was laid out by the Queen at the State Opening of Parliament in 2013. As well as blocking access to services, a new Immigration Bill is planned to make it easier to remove people from the UK by limiting rights to appeal and tightening the use of human rights law.'[15] This came shortly after the anti-immigrant and racist party, UKIP, made significant gains in the local elections. This is yet another example of a government using the immigration card to respond to the rising racist political rivalry and to prove to right-wing voters that they can be as hard a racist party like UKIP.

At the start of 2014 in Britain there was a media-wide hysteria about Bulgarians and Romanians - and eastern Europeans in general. They were consistently depicted by the tabloid media as destitute throngs swamping the country intent on living off the British taxpayer. Mainstream politicians have done precious little to confront such stereotypes and, in the Tories' case, have actually fanned the fire with militant rhetoric. In truth, there is overwhelming evidence that migrants from the EU's 'new member-states' make a net contribution to the British economy.

The conditions for asylum seekers in Ireland - and in many other EU countries - have never been humanitarian or fair at the most basic level. There are a number of legal/practical conditions that are designed to isolate people waiting for the completion of their refugee process, and ensuring that these people never feel at home or at ease during the years of extreme uncertainty. These conditions are not only inhumane but also provide the political and practical basis for easy and consequence-free removal and deportation by the Irish state:

- The first and foremost condition trapping the asylum seekers in the long process of refugee application is the legal ban on taking up employment. Many young, educated, skilled adults are banned from taking up employment opportunities, even during the time where labour shortage was an issue

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[14]Angela Merkel cited in 'German multiculturalism has 'utterly failed''. *The Guardian* `http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-german-multiculturalism-failed`

[15]Philippe Naughton, 'Immigration curbs at heart of Queen's Speech' *The Times*. 8 May 2013.

in many different sectors.

- Unavailability of access to third level education.

- Direct Provision and accommodation centres instead of employment and education rights. As per the direct provision system, adult asylum seekers are kept in accommodation centres, fed and are given a weekly sum of €19.10. This provision was introduced in 1999 and the actual amount has not changed since then. There is little or no freedom for asylum seekers living in these accommodation centres that are run by private companies and many have inadequate facilities and services.

The EU constantly invents new ways of keeping the legal and 'undocumented' migrants out. Shaun Harkin argues that 'In many respects, governments are doing less and less to regulate the flow of trade and finance between nations, but they are taking increasingly tough action to restrict the flow of people across borders. More restrictions will never stop migration - the economic imperative for workers struggling to feed themselves and their families will force them to cross borders, no matter what the risks. But the restrictions can make this much more dangerous and oppressive, by forcing the most vulnerable people in society into relying on smugglers and human traffickers, not to mention the exploitative businesses where they end up working.'[16]

The militarization of the U.S. border with Mexico and the EU border control agency Frontex are prime examples of how nation states increasingly tighten their borders. On one hand capitalists are dependent on migration across borders to employ them in their factories and businesses but on the other hand they also use the state's immigration control mechanism and restrictions to create a competition among workers, to define workers as native, migrant and illegal that will create divisions among them and enable capitalists to more easily exploit and intimidate workers. Such measures also give capitalists the flexibility to control the flow of workers depending on the circumstances such as the boom and bust times in economy. Workers and migrant workers are seen as fully flexible resources that the capitalists can fully control.

A specific immigration control measure the EU applies is the 'Readmission Agreement' signed between EU and third-party non-EU countries. This agreement is another step in EU's 'fortress Europe' border and immigration policies. The latest country to sign this agreement is Turkey. According to this agreement, the EU will consider easing-off the visa regulations and procedures for Turkish citizens and in return Turkey must accept the deported 'illegal' immigrants who had entered the EU via Turkey. With this new agreement, we see the EU/Frontex border control policies in action again. EU is now setting up partnerships with countries like Turkey to outsource the issue of migrants instead of looking after people and providing them with free, legal and safe passage, and proper procedures for applying for documented migrant and residency status.

Migrants and asylum seekers are increasingly viewed by EU governments as 'criminals'. During last two decades there have been more than 20000 migrant deaths at sea. As EU continues to militarise its borders using the border control agency Frontex, this 'Readmission Agreement' is a reaction to its failed, inhuman immigration and asylum policies. In 2013, we have seen the horrific tragedy in Lampedusa (Italy) where more than 350 migrants died at sea. Since this tragedy, there have been at least five similar incidents. Unfortunately, such tragedies rarely get reported widely and the little media attention paid to such tragedies never goes deep enough to analyse the real situation.

As the EU leaders and bureaucrats continue to bang on the drums of 'immigration

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[16]Shaun Harkin, 'Solidarity has no borders', *SocialistWorker.org*, http://socialistworker.org/2013/05/01/solidarity-has-no-borders

crisis' and 'problems caused by the asylum seekers' we should remember a few points: Firstly, the history of Europe is also the history of all sorts of migrations, including economic migration. Migrants are not new to Europe and nothing that has gone fundamentally wrong in Europe is due to the incoming migrants or asylum seekers. Secondly, seeking asylum is a right and a very natural response by people to terrible conditions in their own countries. Migration and seeking asylum must be seen, above all, as a humanitarian situation and must receive a humane response. There is nothing more understandable than a mother's attempt to create a better/safer life for her children, families running away from extreme poverty, people running away from wars, torture, oppression and dictatorial regimes etc. Packing a boat by 4-5 times of its capacity and hoping to cross the vast sea is not a lifestyle or an easy choice for these migrants. It is also not an act of blind madness. It is a necessary response to their objective conditions. Thirdly, the EU has never implemented inclusive, welcoming and accommodating policies for migration. Asylum seekers are always stigmatised and marginalised, migrants are always seen as the 'others'. At times of crises, migrants and asylum seekers are always attacked as the easy targets.

Today, for many asylum seekers and migrants there is simply no democratic, safe and legal way to come to Europe. Migrants must first make it into a EU country by whatever way they can before making an application for protection. That is why many people have no choice but to trust the human traffickers with their lives and the lives of their children. Don't these migrants know the dangers of crossing the sea in an overcrowded old boat? Of course they do. But instead of dying from poverty, war, torture back at home, they at least want to die trying. It is not a pleasant journey these people are making but a 'journey of necessity and hope'. What would you do if you were an Iraqi, Afghan or a Syrian civilian who lost everything?

Racism of Political Leaders and Public Representatives

Public statements by mainstream political personalities, inflammatory comments, racist jargon and speculative arguments create a false public debate and shape the public perception on minorities and immigrants. It has long been an aspect of the right-wing bourgeois political system to popularise racism by spectacular outburst of racist statements, followed by playing the 'freedom of speech' card and then claiming to be misunderstood. Here are a few examples of such racist outbursts from political figures and public representatives:

2009: Fine Gael Mayor of Limerick Kevin Kiely, 'Send home jobless nationals': 'I'm calling for anybody who is living in the State and who can't afford to pay for themselves to be deported after three months. We are borrowing €400 million per week to maintain our own residents and we can't afford it. During the good times it was grand but we can't afford the current situation unless the EU is willing to step in and pay for non-nationals. I'm not racist but it is very simple, we can't continue to borrow €400 million a week and the Government has to pull a halt and say enough is enough unless the EU intervenes and pays some sort of a subvention.' [17]

2011: Fine Gael's Darren Scully quits as mayor of Naas over his comments about 'black Africans: The mayor of Naas Darren Scully told the Kfm radio station he found 'black Africans' to be aggressive and bad mannered. Cllr Scully was accused of racism after the interview in which he said: 'I've been met with aggressiveness, I've been met with bad manners and I've also been played the race card.' When asked, 'It's been said, 'you would help white people but you don't help black people'.' He went on to say: 'After a while of this I made a decision that I was not going to take on representations from Africans. I've said that I would be

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[17]http://www.limerickleader.ie/news/local-news/mayor-of-limerick-quot-send-home-jobless-nationals-quot-1-2190575

very courteous to them and that I would pass on their query to other public representatives who would take their concerns It saddens me that people would call me a racist because I'm not. I know what I am as a person and I'm not any of those things.' Darren Scully re-joined Fine Gael in 2013. [18]

2014: Former Lord Mayor of Cork, Fine Gael councillor Joe O'Callaghan: A ban on the Burqa and Niqab is 'common sense': In an interview with Niall Boylan on Classic Hits 4fm, Joe O'Callaghan said Irish people are 'sometimes afraid of our own shadows to say things that might not be popular'. He went on to say that 'This has nothing to do with religious freedoms. The Koran doesn't even state that women should have to wear the Burqa or the Niqab' he said. 'Whether it's a balaclava or a burqa, we don't go along in this free secular liberal republic state of anyone hiding the wearers identity. I would say it's probably a medieval system.' The councillor said he wants 'everyone who lives in this country to be free and safe so any detachment from that, we should face up to it and say look this doesn't make sense'.[19]

Racism in the State/Private Media

The racial stereotyping of people using the power of media and imagery is widespread in our society. It creates fear and anxiety in society by presenting unproven, baseless arguments and media driven speculation as facts. In Ireland and elsewhere, contrary to their own claims the media is not an independent set of institutions. Overwhelmingly it is owned and controlled either by big business or by the state. If capitalists and the state have a shared racist agenda then the media will too, and in fact it plays a crucial part in spreading racist ideas.

One way this operates is through the employment and promotion of 'controversial' columnists such as Ian O'Doherty and Kevin Myers. Both of these worked for *The Independent* and both had as part of their brief the regular stirring up of racism. O'Doherty has written that 'If every junkie in this country were to die tomorrow I would cheer', and that gays are 'sexual deviants'. Among his specialities has been attacking Muslims arguing that Islam is 'the biggest threat to the West since the end of the Cold War'. For this he was rewarded by RTE with invitation to make a documentary called 'Now It's Personal' in which he spent a week with a Muslim family in Dublin. The documentary began with footage of 9/11 and of an extremist Muslim threatening to take over the world. In other words it was calculated to reinforce the association of Muslims with terrorism.

Kevin Myers writes things like, 'A hugely disproportionate amount of rural crime is by a handful of Travellers... they have generated an atmosphere of terror in rural areas unlike anything Ireland has experienced since the 1920s' and that 'no one can deny this unassailable truth: our unemployment figures have been made immeasurably worse by the large numbers of immigrants who poured unchecked into the Celtic Tiger economy'. In July 2008 Meyers wrote an article entitled 'Africa is Giving Nothing to Anyone - Apart from Aids' in which he asked, 'How much morality is there in saving an Ethiopian child from starvation today?' He attacked an anti-malaria programme sponsored by Bill Gates saying: 'If his programme is successful, tens of millions of children who would otherwise have died in infancy will survive to adulthood, he boasts. Oh good: then what? I know. Let them all come here. Yes, that's an idea.'

Of course O'Doherty and Myers are not typical but that they are given major platforms in the media is not accidental. Also alongside this overt racism there is a lower level but consistent tendency in the media as a whole to reinforce stereotypes with stories such as 'A gang of Romanian criminals is behind a sinister prostitution racket that

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[18]http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/fine-gaels-darren-scully-quits-as-mayor-of-naas-over-his-comments-about-black-africans-26794755.html

[19]http://www.thejournal.ie/burqa-cork-mayor-1309582-Feb2014/

has turned a well-known part of Limerick city into a red-light district, a *Sunday Independent* investigation reveals'. The media repeatedly present stories about immigration in terms of immigrants 'flooding' into the country. The use of the 'flooding' metaphor has become so regular that it passes without comment.

Racism in Foreign and International Affairs of the State

The 'war on terror' has produced a corresponding rise in Islamophobia with various states initiating legal, legislative and executive platforms against Muslims. EU leaders who constantly talk about the 'crisis of illegal immigration' are also the same leaders who started wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, who supported and sold arms to Middle-Eastern/African dictators, who grabbed ever bit of fresh water sources and fertile land in Africa and with the help of local rulers, forced IMF policies and privatisation upon the poor nations of the world. These are the very same leaders whose policies are killing the planet and causing 'not-so-much' natural and environmental disasters and destroying the lives of millions. Why do we have drought and famine in Africa? Is it all because of gods' anger? Why are there 5 million displaced people in Afghanistan and 2 million in Iraq? Why are western governments and arms companies selling billions of Euro worth of arms to some of the most oppressive regimes in the world?

The EU leaders and governments are not suffering from a memory loss. They are just hoping that we won't remember all these and that we won't ask these questions. What were they expecting? That the killing zones of Iraq, Afghanistan, or the dictatorial African regimes not to have an effect in number of asylum seekers and migrant coming into Europe? Millions of Nigerians live under 2 Dollars a day. Many of the farmers in Central African countries have their natural water sources taken away from them by multi-national corporations. And despite all of these, there is not and there never was, an immigration crisis in Europe. Each and every decade we are fed with statistical lies and political perceptions that are presented as fact.

How do you kill in Iraq the same number of people as the population of Dublin or displace in Afghanistan the same number of people as the population of Ireland? How do you justify assisting imperialist powers to use your civilian airports on their way to kill civilian people? Fuelling Islamophobia, in this manner serves to create the popular sentiment that action is required for the greater good and the survival of modern, superior democracy and western style freedom and life.

Economic Racism - Cuts breed racism

Cuts to minority support programs, such as the Traveller, language support services for migrant children, along with reduced funding for various institutions working in the area of equality, anti-discrimination and racism, forces various economically vulnerable sections of the society to compete with each other and creates the myth of welfare tourism or 'jobs for citizens'.

Since the beginning of the global financial crisis the people who matter least to the capitalists and the state are always the poor, the working class people, migrants and minorities. All that matters is the financial losses of speculative investors and the wider economic protection of the wealthy elite and big business. In Ireland in the past five years have seen relentless cuts and austerity applied to all sorts of essential public services and services needed by the poor and dispossessed. While hundreds of thousands of working class families are pushed into poverty, single parents, the unemployed, special needs children, the sick, the elderly and the asylum seekers are left to fight for scraps to survive. School places and hospitals beds have been reduced to a bare minimum, while funding for various groups running anti-racist campaigns; providing support to victims of torture and various NGOs such as the Equality Authority have been slashed to almost nothing. Every vulnerable section of society has been forced to fight

for their very survival. The crisis showed us that the 'small', 'unimportant' people do not matter to the ruling classes of the country. As teachers and medical staff are reduced, families are forced to compete for school places while the sick are left to wait for months for a medical procedure. Asylum seekers, the inhumane direct provision system, and other vulnerable groups are suddenly presented as a burden on the ordinary citizens of the country. This environment also gives rise to divisive and racist debate where political leaders have stigmatized the 'lazy social welfare addicted young people', 'the welfare tourist migrants', 'the foreign workers that take Irish jobs' and 'the single parents that refuse to work'.

While more than €100 billion were given to bond holders and bank bail-outs, Travellers and their basic economic, social needs are labelled as a cost that the country cannot afford. As more jobs were lost and more pension schemes were closed, migrant workers are presented as the people who steal the jobs from the native Irish workers, 'Irish Jobs for Irish Workers', only if these jobs existed. Social housing has been reduced to almost nothing; the housing schemes have been replaced with the rent assistance system, thus making the waiting lists huge, while blaming the foreigners for getting into the queue ahead of the local people.

Austerity and cuts are not just hard economic attacks on ordinary people but they also serve to create a political atmosphere that breeds anxiety, demoralisation, fear, anger, division and ultimately racism. Austerity is not some unavoidable fact of life but the result of economic and political choices made by the ruling elites on behalf of the national and international capitalists.

The ruling elites not only attack the working class and every vulnerable sections of the society with hard economic policies but also with a political system that lacks democracy and creates social issues as part of the capitalist response to the crisis. During times of capitalist crises, the disadvantaged sections of society become even more vulnerable. The exploitation of workers increases on many fronts.

Divisions among the rich and the poor become a more evident. The capitalists and the ruling elites use any means to divert the attentions of the workers and the poor from the real sources of the miseries they endure. Thus, by cuts they breed racism; a much useful tool for the rulers to further advanced their economic and political agenda.

Racism is not just a mistaken idea or even a morally wrong one; for working people it is a deadly enemy. It threatens to divert, derail and divide the resistance working class people put up to austerity, cuts, the bosses and the government. And the state and its institutions play a central role in organising and promoting racism at various levels. Nation states promote the idea of national borders, nationalism, national culture and unity against the '*others*' while within the same society the rulers at the top continue to exploit the masses at the bottom. The exploitive, unequal concept of national or ethnic 'US' against 'THEM' created by official state policies enhanced by state/institutional racism hides the fact that workers of different nations, different colour and ethnicity have a lot more common with each other than with their own respective ruling classes. Getting working people to accept racist ideas and turn their anger on 'foreigners' (or Travellers, or Roma etc) makes them putty in the hands of unprincipled right wing politicians and the right wing newspapers. It turns them, in the words of Bob Dylan, into 'Only a Pawn in their Game'.

Is the Irish state racist?

The question whether the Irish state is racist or not needs to be answered. Let's think of some quick points and concepts and see if we can come up with an answer to this question:

- Years of discrimination and finger pointing at Roma people.

- Asylum seekers and the direct provision system which traps them in inhumane conditions without the right to work and higher education.

- Well documented, harsh, and anti-democratic refugee application and appeals process.

- Secret deportations of asylum seekers under harsh conditions.

- Various racist statements from national and local politicians about Africans, eastern European workers and others minorities.

- The famous referendum of 2004 to remove the constitutional right of citizenship to the children of non-nationals living in Ireland.

- Numerous examples of politicians, state bodies and media propaganda against migrants and non-nationals with the claim that they are committing social welfare fraud and draining the funds.

- A specific example of racial profiling at the airports: Passengers on some flights coming from certain countries are passport checked at the gate of the plane before exiting it instead of the normal passport control desks. This is to be able to push the 'unwanted' passengers back into the plane to send them back to where they came from. In this way they cannot come into the country and ask for asylum. Ongoing 'war on terror' in Afghanistan, the related Islamophobia and Ireland's support to it via the use of Shannon by US military aircraft.

- And finally, the economic crisis and the political-economic decisions of the governments to cut many of the social-public services which are much needed by the poor, minorities, and the deprived sections of the society. These are all the conditions in which fear and hatred can thrive: Job losses, family break-ups, emigration, housing crisis, cuts etc. are only some of these.

If you agree with these points you probably agree that the Irish state is racist. But no state, unless it is a fascist or an apartheid regime, will admit being racist. Even then, it would be a miracle to hear this voluntary admittance of being racist. While the state will reject in every possible way that they are racist, they will also introduce laws that discriminate against certain people in the society. The legal system of the state is fundamentally non-transparent, anti-democratic and in the hands of an elite section of the society.

States also play the nationalist game and introduce physical and political borders. These borders will be very useful in terms of controlling the people's migration as well as creating an artificial common national goal and national identity. These borders will create a sense of belonging and they will help in defining the 'us vs. the others'. Immigration control will be a useful tool in manipulating the society. Exclusion of rights, based on arbitrary human characteristics such as place of birth, colour of skin, religion etc. will become important aspects of nationalism. These will ultimately feed into racist state actions.

The state will directly or indirectly support wars abroad that will ultimately create a huge refugee crisis somewhere around the world. Following that, the political rulers will have no problem to compartmentalise the issues and direct all their attention on incoming war refugees. But ultimately state will protect the ruling class and to do that it will arm itself with propaganda machine, police force, spin doctors etc. These forces will always be useful to protect the outer fence of the state machine and the beneficiaries of this ring-fenced privilege. But they will also assume roles such as child protection, law enforcement and social order that the state needs have in place to operate in peace.

Conclusions

I would argue that the most important aspect of the fight against state racism is to explicitly and clearly expose the capitalist state and its racist institutions. The fight against a racist/fascist street gang that is attacking people may require some different urgent ac-

tions but when it comes to state racism, the task at hand becomes a lot more complex and deep and is part of the ongoing struggle against capitalism. The reason for exposing state/institutional racism being extremely important is not because of the pleasure of some 'intellectual achievement', but because of the necessity to turn it into a real, flesh and blood enemy and bring it out of its hiding places such as the state departments, court rooms, police stations, schools and indeed the news channels.

Many decent people and organisations denounce and distance themselves from the hatred and violence. But what is really needed is a grass-roots response and a working class struggle which links opposition to racism to a fight against the conditions in which they thrive, in other words, capitalism. The exposure of it as a 'physical evil of capitalism - and imperialism' will also enable us to start questioning its origins and its real objectives.

It will help us to understand how it operates and will aid us in our fight against capitalism. Only then, we can make direct links between the state and the suffering of the people in the hands of its racist institutions. Only then, we can clearly see that the institutional racism is not just a matter of state departments making some occasional mistakes, but that they are acting according a very clearly defined political setup. We can then see the link between state racism and all other forms of racism and realise how the racism on the street feeds off the racism of the state. For Marxists, the point is not just to understand all of this but also to change the whole system. Unless our attempts to analyse and understand the state racism goes hand in hand with dismantling the racist system, all of this hard work could make a great PhD thesis or a great article but it won't have any impact beyond the point of an intellectual argument.