

TFS Seminar Backcasting Project

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This is a meditation about a changing country and society, however it also centered on my own experience of these changes and some constructive thinking about how Irish society can respond better to these changes.

1998

1998 was an important year in Irish history. The Good Friday Agreement was signed that April, seemingly putting an end to 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland which had lasted over 30 years. As ancient ethno-religious tensions were being resolved in Belfast, Boyzone released their fourth UK number 1 single with 'No Matter What', staying top of the charts right up until Bill Clinton, fresh out of the Lewinsky scandal, visited at the beginning of that September to 'ensure peace'. By the 28th of that same month, I was born in Rotunda Hospital, Dublin. Not that I had a clue at the time, however, the most transformative change overcoming Ireland was not peace agreements, presidents or chart-topping love ballads (or my birth), it was what economists called '*The Celtic Tiger*' and 1998 was smack in the middle of it.

The Celtic Tiger



In the matter of a generation, Ireland had transformed from being one of the poorest countries in the European Union to being one of the fastest growing economies in the world (Kirby, 2016).

Where before our economy rested on agriculture, the rapid expansion of the IT, pharmaceutical and services industries began drawing money into an island that had never been too familiar with it. Recalling the early, frantic years of the Celtic Tiger in the 90s, my parent's generation remarked on how money seemed to be growing on trees. Jobs, whose absence had driven mass emigration from Ireland in the 1980s, now seemed to be popping up everywhere. Folks who had emigrated in leaner times had returned to find an economy, and country, substantially transformed.

However, the *Celtic Tiger* was not just a time of rapid economic growth. It also engendered huge social and cultural change. Conservative, Catholic Ireland shrank, while a hybrid Ireland emerged, embodying a more progressive, Euro-American culture and all of its accompanying freedoms and norms. One of the aspects of social change that was most noticeable during this time was the arrival of tens of thousands of economic migrants to the country from the EU. This inward migration was by no means the first introduction of non-Irish to Ireland. Irish nationalist rhetoric has long convinced Irish people that the island is more ethnically and culturally homogenous than it actually is. As Loyal (2018) notes, the historical presence of Travellers, Scottish presbyterians and protestants as well as Black Irish people dispels this myth. Furthermore, Ireland had been colonized repeatedly for 1200 years and repeatedly, colonizers had settled and married into the population. Ireland had been, at least since the Vikings arrived in the late 8th century, a multicultural and multiethnic society (Rolston and Shannon, 2002). The Vikings came, then the Normans and then the Brits, who were not as keen to make friends with the local Irish! They were adamant about dismantling Ireland's chieftoms, clan systems and indigenous culture.



The Celtic Tiger was the 'Roaring 20s' moment in Irish history, characterized by a lot of excess, greed and over-indulgence.

Colonialism, Emigration and Irish National Identity

The Irish economy developed as a colonial economy, largely to serve the interests of the British rulers. As subjects, the Irish suffered greatly, resulting in numerous uprisings and brutal suppressions. The Famine that lasted from 1845 to 1849 was the literal nail in the coffin for many brutalized, marginalized Irish in the more rural parts of the country (Coogan, 2012). Those who could escape did so, and Ireland's population plummeted from 8 million in pre-famine times to a mere 3.5 million a hundred years later.

My Grandma, born in 1940, remarks on Ireland during the 40s and 50s as a grim enough place. Although community was highly valued and people were largely decent, the imminent threat of poverty and the deeply conservative, repressive culture implemented by the church combined to drive many Irish away for good. Over 500,000 people, more than 10% of the island's population, emigrated between 1945 and 1960 (Delaney, 2014). The idea and inevitability of emigration was deeply entwined with Irish culture. Emigration combined with repeated colonization ensured Ireland was deeply connected with the outside world from early on in its history, far from being the ethnically and religiously homogeneous state that nationalist rhetorics often depict.

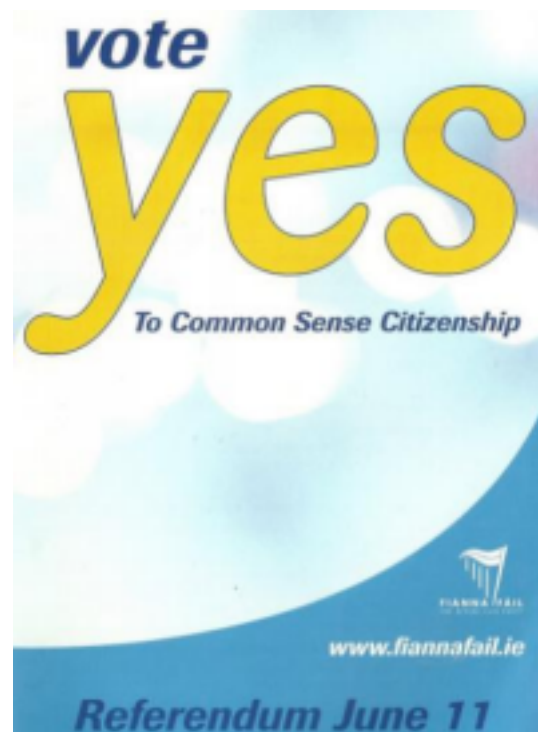


Irish emigration in the mid-20th Century

So, pulling us back to today, Ireland in 2023, how has this changed? With the Celtic Tiger, Ireland went from being an emigration station to a destination. Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, predominantly from Eastern European countries like Poland and Lithuania, arrived in Ireland during this time in search of work (Fanning, 2013). Their arrival was actively encouraged by the Irish government, in response to labor shortages in certain, lower-paying sectors of the economy. Soon, Polish was more widely spoken than Irish in Ireland (Fanning, 2018). Whilst the new diversity was welcomed by many, ethnic chauvinism and xenophobia emerged to reinforce Ireland's increasingly exclusionary nationalism.

'Common Sense Citizenship'

In June 2004, I was 5 going on 6. I don't remember much about that year except that Greece won the Euros and my childminder was Polish and called Justina. Justina would pick myself and my sister Kitty up from school, and we'd walk the 15 minutes back chattering, skipping and fighting. I remember thinking that the election posters were always funny to look at. Ireland seemingly had an endless roll of referendums, local elections, national elections and EU elections. Lots of different posters with funny faces and familiar names. There was one poster I remember talking to my parents, and Justina about, because I could not understand what it meant. It had a holy look to it with the blue and yellow, reminding me of religion textbooks we'd study in class. It read *'Say Yes to Common Sense Citizenship.'*



Now, I hadn't a whinny what it meant, so I broke it down. '*Common sense*'. I'd only ever really heard that in a condescending sorta way, when I wasn't able to figure out something and I'd be scolded. '*Use your common sense Jack.*' Ok, so I guess it kinda meant your gut feeling of what was right. '*Citizen?*'. Whenever I heard that word I immediately thought of Postman Pat. He's a good *citizen*. He works, driving his little red van around, waving to the locals, talking, laughing and petting his cat. An honest sort. He was about the town and an important part of the community. That was a *good citizen* as far as I was concerned.



A good citizen?

So what on earth did 'Common sense citizenship' mean when combined? I guess I had to use my gut instinct and cop-on to decide who was a citizen and who wasn't. As far as I was concerned, everyone on my road and estate must have qualified, and that included Luca from Austria, Robin from South Africa and Raul from Brazil as much as the O'Connors, Kearneys and Sheils. They weren't Postman Pat, but neither was I, and yet Mom said I was a citizen. Those kids did the same things as me. Yeah, they looked a bit different and occasionally spoke languages that weren't English or Irish, but that was a good thing, or at least my parents thought that.

The poster was a referendum on the right to citizenship for the children of non-Irish born in Ireland. 80% of those who voted denied the right of citizenship to children born in Ireland to non-Irish citizens after 2004 (Fanning, 2018). This reflected the fear-fueled racist nationalism that was ingrained in Ireland at the time (Loyal, 2018). Despite emigrating for work for most of our history, now that we had it good, folks who were immigrating to Ireland for the exact same

reason were vilified by politicians, media outlets and far-right groups across the country. The narrative went that the Celtic Tiger was *our* reward, *our* lucky break after centuries of colonial deprivation. The narrative went that *they*, the ‘foreigners’, were here to spoil the party, to take the jobs of good, honest Irish *citizens*. They were characterized as lazy, violent, dirty and stupid (McGinnity et al., 2006). It sounded a lot like the narrative spun around Irish emigrants to the UK and US for the previous two hundred years (Ignatiev, 1994). Not that many talked about that, though.

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Cut out from an American newspaper in the early 1900s. Whilst never as heavily discriminated against as Black or Indigenous Americans, the Irish were long considered pariahs in their new home.

Being Irish

From a young age then, I was aware that a lot of Irish people were plainly racist and paranoid about the relative ethnic and cultural purity of the island being threatened. I noticed, growing up, that these anti-migrant sentiments would flare up in hard times. When the Irish economy and property market imploded in 2008, ‘foreigners’ were again made the scapegoat by many, despite reckless bankers and corrupt politicians being the driving force behind the Celtic Tiger’s abrupt death. As Ireland’s economy slowly recovered during my teen years, Ireland’s diversity was consolidated and to many who grew up in my generation, it was normal. As long as I’ve been alive and an Irish citizen, I have been surrounded by people not born in this country. I considered the Pakistanis working in Centra, the Nigerian taximen, the Slovakian childminders and the Chinese restaurant workers to be integral to how I knew and loved my country. Ireland was never a nation of red-haired, freckled and blue eyed people, as much as the Irish tourist board would have Americans and the like believe.

There is more complexity behind racism and anti-immigrant sentiment in Ireland, however, than simply Irish nationalism is a racist idea. It's never a black and white issue of who's racist and who's not, who's wrong and who's right, as much as the media and modern culture would like us to think so. There are nuances and uncertainties around Irish nationalism in an increasingly unequal republic that must be acknowledged and confronted. For example, there were complexities with regards to who was opposing migrants and who was supporting their arrival. Typically, as reflected in recent anti-immigrant protests in poorer areas of the country, they are working class citizens with low levels of education and likely experience financial hardship in some capacity. Asylum seekers are housed in 'Direct Provision' Centers which are disproportionately located near lower-income areas of the country. When these direct provision centers are at capacity, like they are right now, asylum seekers are housed in hotels or other temporary forms of accommodation, almost exclusively in low-income parts of the country.

Thus, lower-income 'Irish' folks have to deal with the realities of immigration a lot more than wealthier Irish folks, reflecting a longstanding class divide in cities like Dublin. Indeed, working-class Dubs in the tenements were long discriminated against by wealthier groups in the suburbs. Despite this, political rhetoric has been shaped to ensure focus is given to questions of national identity and belonging more than income inequality and the accumulation of wealth by Ireland's richest. Before taxation, Ireland has the highest income inequality in the EU (Roantree, 2020). Furthermore, a stark wealth gap has emerged during the housing crisis where homeowners in the country continue to grow their wealth whilst 'Generation Rent' is unable to afford an asset such as a house (Hearne, 2022). The majority of those who make up Ireland's 'working class' are lower-income, white, ethnically Irish folks in rental accommodation and lower-income, ethnically non-Irish folks in a similar predicament. Alas, despite their common interests, there has been very little success in forging a coalition between these two groups.

The working class in Ireland has long been fractionalized along ethnic and religious lines, reflecting the 'divide and rule' approach of the British colonizer (Rahman et al., 2017). When lower-income folks have managed to band together in Irish history, the results have been seismic. The 1913 Lockout exemplified working-class solidarity and power, as workers realized who the common 'enemy' was; the wealthy and elite class in Ireland (Newsinger, 1990). Yet now, as the working class has progressively dissolved as a reality and has been replaced by a myriad of lower-income groups, the chances of politicians creating infighting amongst the most marginalized in society has never been greater.



Big Jim: The 1913 Lockout exemplified working-class solidarity and power, as workers realized who the common 'enemy' was; the wealthy and elite class in Ireland.

The Housing Crisis and Anti-Immigration Protests

The current housing crisis reveals how this infighting amongst lower-income folks can have corrosive social effects. The current housing crisis has fueled a homelessness crisis, pushed a growing number of people into the poorly regulated private rental sector and itself has caused a mass exodus of young Irish who are unable to afford a mortgage (Hearne, 2020). The causes of the housing crisis are multifaceted and complex, however in short it can be attributed to the neoliberalization of housing provision, the decline of government capacity to deliver affordable housing and the entry of global Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) into the housing market after the crash of 2008 (Byrne and Norris, 2022). Certain political parties and anti-migrant groups in Ireland have tried to blame the crisis on the influx of migrants from Eastern Europe, and more recently, Ukraine. Promulgating an incorrect narrative that the housing crisis is a simple supply and demand issue, signs held up at recent anti-migrant protests claiming '*Ireland is Full*' betray the true reality that Ireland has more than enough housing, however not enough that is affordable (Freyne, 2023). Ireland has space, plenty of it, however the houses being built on these spaces are largely unaffordable. Furthermore, an estimated 30% of inner-city housing is vacant, often kept in a state of disrepair by landlords while the market value of the property gradually inflates (CSO (2022), O'Callaghan et al. (2018)). The housing crisis is elite-driven, by a combination of government failure, financialization of housing and legal loopholes that allow for housing to remain vacant amidst a huge shortage of affordable options.



Ireland ain't full: Ireland has space, plenty of it, however the houses being built on these spaces are largely unaffordable.

The danger of simple narratives: 'The Great Replacement'

Alas, simple narratives have a lot of power, and the idea that migrants are taking homes away from Irish citizens is a much easier narrative to follow than the systematic explanation of the crisis given above. Amidst global political polarization, it has never been easier for extremist groups to spread false narratives and build 'new truths' (Dennison and Geddes, 2019). In Ireland, the consequences of extremist capitalization on the housing crisis and Ukraine war have been racist attacks on refugees, non-white Irish citizens and the racially-driven splintering of lower-income communities under the rhetoric of the ongoing 'Great Replacement' of white Irish by refugees and asylum seekers (O'Toole, 2023). It is crucial to note that these protests are not just composed of lower income communities. Far-right ideologues across the income spectrum have descended on these protests, however it is lower-income communities that these extremist groups are infiltrating and catalyzing to march. The white supremacist ideology of 'The Great Replacement' is a right-wing, elite-driven project, as Fintan O'Toole (ibid.) notes

"...there's nothing "underclass" about these ideas [of the Great Replacement]. They are not some kind of weird pathogen that breeds only in conditions of poverty and ignorance. On the contrary, they appeal to elites because they "prove" that inequalities are "natural" – the result of breeding rather than of social conditions."

These elite-driven ideologies appeal to lower-income groups as most economic downsides of immigration are usually unfairly burdened on these already burdened peoples. From the perspective of those marching in Ballymun, East Wall and elsewhere, socially progressive middle-class folks welcome diversity because they never have to deal with the economic fallout of their arrival. Refugees and asylum seekers won't be taking their high-paid jobs or moving into their neighborhoods any time soon. From this distance, middle and upper-middle income folks in Ireland support immigration. In this context, wealthier Irish who are turning their nose up at protestors in working class areas need to be conscious that they (the middle class) likely only have to interact with Ireland's refugees and asylum seekers on an optional level. It is not something forced upon many of them. Protestors cannot be branded a lost cause outright, as that would only retrench the hostility of these protests further. Even if the anti-immigration protests are racist, violent and based on false assumptions about the housing crisis and nature of migrants entering the country, approaching these protests with complete disregard for the people protesting will forestall any meaningful conversation or action ever happening. Spaces wherein communities can respectfully hear each other out and share their perspectives would help balance the extremes currently dictating the narratives about the protests. Spaces wherein people across class, racial and educational lines can share space and re-humanize each other, extracted from lofty political rhetoric, is what is needed in increasingly divided countries like Ireland.



Counter protests have tried to re-balance the anti-immigration narrative being pushed by right wing ideologues and parties.

Transformative spaces, radical futurities and some magic

When it comes to social change, I have always thought in terms of spaces. I know this is a limited approach of conceptualizing how social change occurs, however it is grounded in the

embodied experience of how being in relation with others in cooperatively governed spaces can create a sense of community and solidarity that is a prerequisite for movement building.

I lean heavily on embodied knowledge from myself and others to understand how transformative social change can be achieved. Due to its often elitist nature, I am wary of theories produced by academics about community-building who have never *really* been part of a community before. That being said, there are sometimes concepts and terms employed by academics which can help us to perceive our lived realities more accurately. One of these is the idea of ‘radical imaginaries’.

Viviana Asara, a scholar at the University of Vienna in Austria asked and answered the question that is driving this paper; how can alternative visions and futures be created amidst multiple intersecting crises? Asara (2020) notes that key to the success of these visions is a clear articulation and understanding of the intersectional injustices causing these crises, enabling the mutual recognition of common aspirations, humanity and political beliefs. In introducing the idea of ‘radical imaginaries, Asara highlights how movements which re-captured public space across the world enabled a re-envisioning of how society and relationships could function under regimes of neoliberal austerity;

*“The squares encampments involved first and foremost an awakening – or ‘re-discovering’, as Graeber (2011) puts it – of the radical imagination. The new communal spaces and projects created in the squares **prefigured a different world through their production of new space**, from collective kitchens to community gardens, art spaces, self-organized kindergartens and common libraries (Asara and Kallis 2020). Rupturing the post-political neoliberal consensus, **they represented the continuous materialization, in the here and now, of new radical imaginaries** (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014, Dikeç and Swyngedouw 2017)”* (Asara 2020, p.2)

The following section will highlight how community gardens are opportunities to highlight the inhumaneness of the ‘real world’ and re-imagine an alternative through building relationships that would be unlikely beyond the limits of the community space.



Muck & Magic community garden in Ballymun.

Re-Imagining with Magic

John O'Donoghue is not the type of guy to use the term 'radical imaginary' though. In all truth, although concepts like this are helpful, many people who practice it rarely employ the term or use it outside of academic circles. In many 'foodie' scenes in the U.S there is a dictionary of terms thrown around to describe different forms of activism and community building. At Muck and Magic, the community garden that John helps to run in Ballymun, the dictionary is a lot more straightforward. He talks of friendship, trust and hard work. There's a humility, genuinity and patience to someone like John that can only really be found in grains these days. He's a gentle, intelligent, funny and earnest soul, someone who clearly can balance being a community leader with being an attentive human and friend.

It was refreshing to sit down and talk all things Muck and Magic for a few hours while slurping tea on a bleak January morning. Like many community gardens in Dublin, Muck n Magic was a space born from the economic recession of 2008. During the Celtic Tiger, most land in Dublin was simply too valuable to be used for anything other than a profit-making venture, mainly some form of building development. Community gardens and urban agriculture existed, however it was markedly sparser than in the aftermath of Ireland's dramatic economic collapse, where housing developments were abandoned and land around the city was left fallow and vacant (Corcoran et al., 2017). Mud Island in the north inner city, Serenity garden in nearby Phibsboro and Flanagans Field in Fatima all popped up during this time. This emergence of community-created spaces reflects how the government was doing very little to fund public services or spaces during this time, amidst the brutal IMF-imposed austerity cuts of the early



2010s. Self-reliance was, and continues to be, a key strategy of resistance by many neglected communities across Ireland.

A view of Ballymun from Muck and Magic. The chimney pictured is a relic of the old boiler house that provided heating for the high-rise towers.

And yet, as John humbly recalls it, the birth of Muck and Magic was less a dramatic story of ‘resistance’ than a group of community members deciding they wanted to start a garden. John met a bunch of folks in the community center in Ballymun who were interested in setting up a growing space around this time. Initially called the ‘Ballymun gardening club’, this group of community gardeners got a lease agreement from Dublin City Council for a plot of land and established what would become known as ‘Muck and Magic’ in 2011.

The premise of the name is simple. Get a bunch of people ‘muckin around’, that is, gardening, digging, weeding and the like, then the ‘magic’ will work. That magic is manifold, however according to John, it primarily serves as a gathering space where local folks can drink tea, chat and relax. The shed at the back of the garden is a cozy, higgledy-piggledy place, full of an assortment of old mugs, photos and snacks. It’s a charming, informal space that is perfect for little chats in between muckin about. On the walls are numerous awards the garden has received in the past few years, including one for the best community garden in Ballymun. The small garden has become a lynchpin for one of Dublin’s historically most underprivileged and neglected areas.



Muck and Magic's trophy cabinet

Ballymun

Even in the context of the poorest neighborhoods in Dublin, Ballymun's name is infamous. As Dublin's inner-city became overcrowded and underhoused in the early 1960s, the ambitious, forward thinking Irish government under Sean Lemass began to plot out the first 'modern' council housing estate in the country. The journalist Fintan O'Toole contextualizes the meaning of Ballymun as Ireland attempted to 'modernize' during this time.

"Ireland was sick of being a rural idyll of underdevelopment and mass emigration. The desire to be modern was overwhelming. Hard as it is to reconcile with the later history of the place, Ballymun was part of the new optimism. Thousands of families would move not just from Dublin's dark, disgraceful slums to bright, airy towers with cool lifts, a swimming pool and an ice rink but also from an era of hopelessness into a long-promised but long-delayed future." (O'Toole 2016; read the article at this [link](#)).



An aerial image of Ballymun's 'modern' towers in 1979.

The promises of swimming pools, ice rinks and even basic amenities like supermarkets barely materialized. They were radical imaginaries that were never fulfilled. Ballymun had no services to accommodate its newly relocated and low-income population. Over time, the towers became increasingly neglected by the city council and wider Ireland. The Ballymun towers became the poster child of Ireland's heroin epidemic in the 1980s and all the accompanying poverty, violent crime and food insecurity that accompanied this image. Despite some more successful urban redevelopment programmes in the area, including the provision of a greater number of services and employers (like the furniture superstore IKEA), Ballymun remains a very low-income area, one that needs strong community organizations more than most.

Chakalaka for the Ballymunners

Back in Muck and Magic, I asked John about the people who come every week. Was there a regular crowd? Were they old locals or young college students? Were they mostly 'Ballymunners'? John emphasized they were mostly old and mostly Ballymunners. However he noted that increasingly in recent years there had been young, non-Irish folks coming to Muck and Magic. Here were a bunch of folks who originated from places as widely varying as Swaziland, Tunisia, Nigeria and Botswana. Typically, they were excellent workers and would be able to straight away do most of the gardening tasks unsupervised.

Unfortunately, though, these folks often disappeared after a few weeks or months. These folks were asylum seekers, temporarily housed in nearby hotels as their applications for asylum were being 'processed'. The 'processing' could take months to years, and often these asylum seekers would be in relative limbo whilst they awaited its outcome (O'Reilly, 2018). In many instances, volunteers would appear, get really involved with the garden and then one day, John would get a

message from said volunteer saying they had been relocated with short-notice to another part of Ireland, or expelled out of the country entirely.

I tried to imagine how the garden would function socially, with this fluctuating group of younger, non-Irish, usually non-English speaking asylum seekers working alongside older, Irish, often lifetime 'Ballymunners'. John said that for the most part, the groups co-existed and co-operated in the garden without any issues. Yes, there was an occasional racist sort who would throw a remark around, yet this was almost always shunned by the gardeners. More than anything, the work ethic of many of the asylum seekers deeply impressed many locals, who saw and admired how much knowledge of agriculture and growing they possessed. There were efforts made by the asylum seekers to extend their friendship and build trust with the locals.



African Kale in Muck and Magic planted by two Zimbabwean volunteers, Moses and Thami.

On one occasion a group of African asylum seekers cooked up a huge feast of millet and chakalaka for the 'Ballymunner' crowd. Although the feast was a few hours late and the crowd may not have been taken with everything prepared (Irish folks tend to not be too gastronomically adventurous), the sentiment being conveyed was clear and preconceived barriers between the groups were broken down. Cesar Chavez conveyed this sentiment better

than I could when he said;

“If you really want to make a friend, go to someone’s house and eat with him... The people who give you their food give you their heart.”

And yet despite this good work, Muck and Magic will be closing for good soon. The site they leased from Dublin City Council was only on a temporary lease, and John always knew at the back of his mind that developers would come knocking once the property market in Ireland bounced back. So far, it seems like the site will be used for cost-rental housing, which is promising insofar as Dublin’s housing crisis is concerned, however you have to wonder why Muck and Magic had to be the lamb given up for slaughter. The idea proposed by Dublin City Council is that Muck and Magic will be absorbed into a much larger ‘City Farm’ which would be located around the corner on the site of the demolished Belbutcher flats. The idea sounded promising, however bureaucratic stagnation within Dublin City Council has meant the project has been re-shelved several times over the past 7 or 8 years. This uncertainty has left John and his fellow gardeners uncertain as to whether any work upgrading the garden would be worthwhile, leading to a frustrating uncertainty about how to carry Muck and Magic forward.

Anti-Immigrant Protests in Ballymun

It's a sad situation for a space that is needed more than ever. Only a few days after I visited Muck and Magic in January 2023, hundreds marched in Ballymun outside hotels housing asylum seekers, chanting *‘Ireland is full’* and *‘get them out’*. Far-right parties had infiltrated local community groups in Ballymun with similar narratives to those used in the UK; narratives depicting the asylum seekers as largely young, unvetted men who are being released onto the streets ‘at the risk of society’. Another narrative that was successfully being pushed in Ballymun was placing the blame of the housing crisis on asylum seekers. *‘Send them home to save our home’* the locals shouted. Nothing was mentioned about sending American and Canadian REITS home. Nothing was said about making wealthy developers like Johnny Ronan and his sort to pack their bags. Asylum seekers, perhaps the most vulnerable people in Irish society alongside the homeless, are easy picking for political opportunists.



Anti-Immigrant protests in Ballymun blocking a motorway exit in January 2023.

The success of far-right groups in exploiting working-class communities like Ballymun reflects many failings of the state and in Irish society. One such failure is the lack of support, protection or investment in public, community spaces. The imminent dissolution of Muck and Magic by Dublin City Council, replicated in many other community gardens across the city, serves to further undermine one of Ballymun's few trust-building institutions for Irish locals and non-Irish asylum seekers. Sure, housing will be built where Muck and Magic is and yes, Muck and Magic will continue in some form in the City Farm. However, one can't help but feel its still wrong communities like these are being uprooted by the city council. John and his friends have really created a place that's *magical*. And when one considers the current crises in Ireland, places that foster the magic of trust-building across lines of class, race, gender and nationality must be encouraged and protected at all costs.

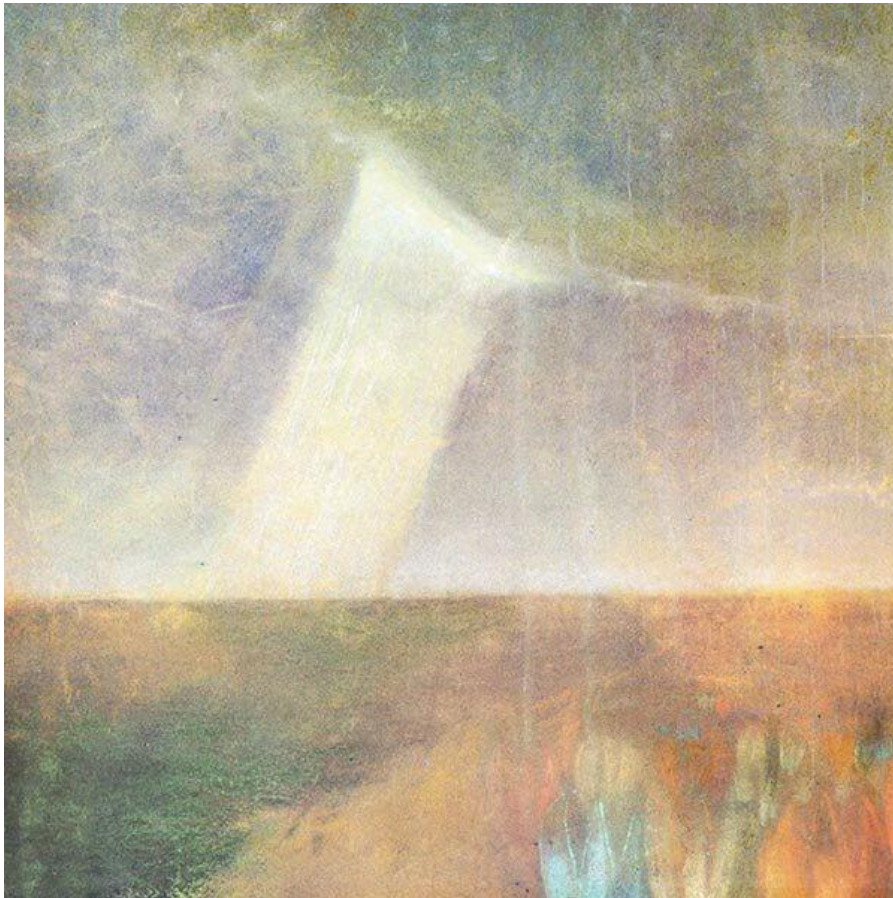
Bringing the magic back

So, what can be done to prevent the magic being sucked out of Irish society entirely?

First off, the Irish government could do worse than to end direct provision, and invest in adequate, well serviced and state-run housing that can meet the needs of asylum seekers. Doing so would improve the livelihoods and security of asylum seekers, as well as undermining current 'Great Replacement' narratives about asylum seekers taking Irish housing.

Second, Dublin City Council must introduce a variety of zoning and ordinance measures which can guarantee the security of tenure for spaces like Muck and Magic. Community gardens come at no cost to the city and yet provide an invaluable trust-building institution for diverse lower-income communities. There is a need for more affordable housing, yes, but if what's being shoved out to build houses are the only few public spaces in the neighborhood, then you're going to have a repeat of what 1980s Ballymun was in a lot more parts of the country.

Thirdly, in tandem with disestablishing direct provision and protecting community gardens that serve lower-income communities, there needs to be more bridging between the housing, refugee justice, environmental justice and anti-austerity movements. There are links already there but they must be worked upon and spaces must be created which foster alternative, radical futurities to reflect their vision.



Envisioning the future is a difficult task, however radical imaginaries of the future can be embodied in spaces like community gardens.

Wrapping up

Community gardens like Muck and Magic are no panacea to Ireland's woes. Yet there is something radically simple in what spaces like it manage to foster. Stepping away from politics,

away from narratives, away from a crisis after bloody crisis. Boiling it down to humans, mucking around with a common goal of nurturing, cultivating and growing.

When I return to Dublin next year I plan on working to strengthen and create spaces just like Muck and Magic. Spaces that are sovereign, cooperatively run by the community they are situated in and that create the magic that builds bridges between folks of varying backgrounds. I want to work with schools in lower-income neighborhoods to use these garden spaces as learning spaces. There is no reason why a space shouldn't play host to 75 year old local dubs, Syrian refugees in their 30s, college students, primary school-age children and folks from all class backgrounds. The fact that this image would be deemed radical and improbable by most reflects the deep-seeded social divisions in a society that is losing its 'magic' spaces. I hope in my life I can help protect and build this magic up for the city I love.