11 Tradition and ethnic interaction: second wave Irish settlement in Luton and Bolton

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'My wife's parents are here and our friends are Irish, so it's like home.'
(Luton, married man, arrived in Britain 1964, came to Luton from London 1964)

'I've settled in. I feel like a Boltonian.'
(Bolton, married man, arrived direct from Ireland 1966)

Time is an essential ingredient of the assimilation process. Many studies present snapshot views of ethnic interaction, dictated by census or sometimes survey data. Evidence that assimilation is culture specific (Bagley 1973), however, suggests that the process should be viewed cumulatively. At any given moment, the relationship between different ethnic groups living side by side reflects attitudes and shared experiences developed over time, as well as immediate circumstances. Both contemporary processes and the contribution of the past must therefore be examined if recent developments are to be understood.

An approach that recognises the dynamic aspects of ethnic relations and allows the mechanism of change to be examined is that based on primary group composition. Primary groups comprise those with whom an intimate face-to-face relationship is maintained, involving the whole personality rather than segmented roles (Cooley 1909). Eisenstadt (1954) related the changes in role-expectations necessary for immigrant 'resocialisation' to the 'formation of new channels of communication with the wider society' and ultimately 'the establishment of new primary groups in common with them'. Similarly, Gordon (1964) made structural assimilation or 'large-scale entrance into the primary groups of the majority society' the key process in his typology, which also included cultural, marital, identificational, behavioural, attitudinal and civic assimilation. If structural assimilation occurred, progress towards loss of a separate group identity would follow; if not, cultural 'ism, in which intrinsic ethnic traits are retained, would persist. Thus in order to examine processes of change, attention must focus on the formation of primary groups. In turn, this may provide a crucial link between social interaction and residential clustering.

Many studies, notably those of the Chicago School of Ecology, have found parallels between the distribution pattern of an immigrant group and the strength of external ties. Park's (1926) dictum concerning the inevitable association between spatial and social relationships has been amply illustrated (Peach 1975). However, the precise nature of the process linking the two aspects of segregation remains obscure. In particular, the social change that precedes or follows residential movement is little understood. Even Lieberson (1963), whose study of the relationship between degree of segregation and a number of significant indices of assimilation remains one of the most thorough objective attempts to relate the outcomes of the two processes, could only assume the existence of such a link: 'This study, applying the perspective of human ecology to the assimilation of immigrant groups and their children in our society, finds fairly orderly and consistent patterns which can best be interpreted on the assumption that the process of assimilation is bound up with the process of residential segregation in American cities' (my italics).

A key to the clarification of the link between spatial and social processes may lie in the concept of the primary group. By definition, primary groups rely on propinquity, at least in the formative stages. The extent to which the neighbourhood itself fosters close friendships outside the family is a measure of the active contribution of spatial factors to inter-group relationships. Initial immigrant settlement is often clustered for mutually reinforcing reasons such as information flow, practical assistance, housing availability and access to ethnic institutions (MacDonald & MacDonald 1962, Hyland 1970). Thus initial members of reformed primary groups are likely to be confined to the ethnic group for both social and spatial reasons. Subsequent voluntary movement away from immediate contact with the initial group members is an indication either of a willingness to expand the range of potential primary group members through exposure to neighbours of a different background, or of indifference to distance travelled to maintain the original contacts (Etzioni 1959, Jakie & Wheeler 1969). Involuntary moves, though they may eventually result in the ethnic intermixture of primary groups, are likely to be accompanied by further shrinkage of the field of contacts unless these can be maintained over a distance (Young & Willmott 1962).

Rex and Moore (1967) have suggested a five stage model which links size and content of primary groups to spatial change. The first stage is characterised by 'anomie' experienced by some migrants cut off from their home culture and lacking ties with the new society. At the second, immigrants join a primary community of people from their country of origin, thus re-establishing a wider social network within the 'colony' as a stable base from which to acquire new norms. The third and fourth stages result in the establishment of formal and informal social ties respectively with the new society, and the fifth involves a spatial
move away from the colony 'except for reasons of retrospective sentiment'. According to this predicted sequence, the neighbourhood plays two roles in the assimilation process. It provides a stable background within which new ties may be established on first arrival and subsequently gives opportunities to confirm and strengthen the process of assimilation that follows such re-socialisation. This assumes that neighbours are significant members of primary groups. Unless this is true then the links between social and spatial processes are ecological correlations reflecting simply the social structure of the two groups.

A number of studies have shown that physical distance is positively related to friendship formation (Beshears 1962, Timms 1971). Clearly, two major effects are involved. One is social homogeneity of neighbourhood, given the tendency to select friends of similar background (Gans 1968, Boal 1971). Secondly, opportunities and preference for contact, both initial and repeated, increase with propinquity (Moore & Brown 1970, Johnston 1974, Ley 1974). Mobility, both in daily activity patterns and longer-term residential relocation, is a crucial factor. Thus the importance of the neighbourhood, or familiar area surrounding the home, varies for different subgroups of the population (Western 1973, Strutz 1976). Many examples of tightly knit locality-based social networks among less mobile working-class groups are available (Young & Willmott 1962, Bott 1971), whereas more widely dispersed structures and even 'non-place realms' have been shown to typify middle-class behaviour (Webber 1964). Age is also a major variable. Children, housewives and the elderly spend a large part of their leisure time in or close to the home even in very mobile societies (Everitt 1976). Married men with young children also increase the number of local contacts at this time (Fischer 1977). Since a large proportion of the British population falls into one or more of these subgroups, it may be assumed that the neighbourhood is a major area for the formation of social contacts. Moreover, the Irish-born population in Britain is disproportionately concentrated in the lower socio-economic categories and in family groupings at the child-rearing stage. In 1971 43.8 per cent of males born in the Irish Republic were classified as belonging to the Registrar General's Socio-Economic Groups IV and V compared with 28.6 per cent of the total population, and 51.5 per cent lived in one-family households comprising a married couple with children compared with 43.0 per cent of the total population.

An analysis of the content and residential distribution of primary group membership over time is thus an index of the changing degree of structural assimilation of an immigrant group. It is a significant index because it concerns the process by which the change is accomplished, though clearly the mechanism of residential allocation is also crucial in providing the opportunity surface from which neighbours may be chosen.

Theories and empirical studies of assimilation have largely been developed in the context of colonisation, particularly in North America and Australasia (Gordon 1964, Taft 1966). But the postwar expansion of immigration to Britain has underlined the need to examine ethnic relationships in more stable and homogeneous receiving societies (Banton 1967). Most migration streams into Britain are either completed or of very recent origin. The only flow that may be studied longitudinally over at least five or six generations and which continues to be reinforced by new arrivals is that from Ireland (Fig. 11.1). This provides a valuable case study of the effects on present-day immigrants of inter-ethnic social relationships in the past. Not only are shared experiences and attitudes inherited, but inter-marriage has blurred the distinction between immigrant and receiving societies. The impact of past immigration has not been uniform throughout Britain, however. Whereas the 'first wave', in the 19th century, was concentrated in Scotland and the North-West, the 'second wave', dating approximately from the 1930s, focused on the South-East and the Midlands, with more recent extensions into the South-West and East Anglia (Fig. 11.2) (Walter 1980). By comparing Irish communities in the newer and long established areas of settlement, the consequences of length of contact may be clarified.

![Figure 11.1 Total Irish-born population resident in Great Britain, 1841-1971](sources: Census of Great Britain 1841, 1851; Census of England and Wales 1921, 1951, 1961, 1971; Census of Scotland 1951, 1961).
The study of Irish immigration also has a wider relevance. It is frequently used comparatively in studies of contemporary black migration to Britain. Thus the apparent loss of separate identity, or assimilation, of earlier immigrants has encouraged the forecast of an ‘Irish future’ for West Indians in contrast to the ‘Jewish future’ of continued cultural pluralism for Asians. The Irish are also used as a ‘colour control’ group in studies of immigrant settlement (Jones 1967, Peach 1968, Lee 1977). As yet, however, little research has focused on the Irish themselves in order to provide a firm basis for such comparisons.

Methods

The empirical data for this investigation are drawn from detailed interviews carried out between 1973 and 1975 with Irish immigrants and people of Irish descent. Respondents were selected randomly from a comprehensive list of residents with Irish names, or of known Irish origin, compiled at two levels of areal stratification. At the regional scale, two medium-sized towns, Luton (total population, 1971: 161,405) and Bolton (total population, 1971: 154,702), were selected to represent areas of substantial recent and long-established Irish settlement, respectively. Luton had 5.8 per cent (total: 9,340) Irish-born inhabitants in 1971, a proportion exceeded only by Stretford (7.0 per cent) and Coventry (6.1 per cent). Although Bolton had 7.9 per cent Irish-born inhabitants in 1861 at the height of the ‘first wave’ of immigration, by 1971 only 1.7 per cent (total: 2,593) had been born in Ireland. From data available in the census, it is known that the population characteristics of the Irish-born in the two towns correlated closely with those of the total Irish-born in their respective regions.

At the intra-urban scale, four enumeration districts in each town were identified by Social Area Analysis (1960 census data) (Fig. 11.3). These corresponded to the distribution of social and demographic characteristics of the total Irish-born population in the town, and in each group the enumeration district with the highest percentage of Irish-born was selected. In both towns this resulted in the choice of two areas in the denser ‘core’ of Irish settlement, located at the centre and periphery, respectively, and two suburban areas, one inner and one outer. However, the contrasting histories of the development of the towns and their Irish communities produced considerable differences in the character of these areas. Most conspicuous was the density of the Irish-born population. In Luton, the core areas contained 15.7 and 10.5 per cent Irish-born respectively, compared with 6.0 and 4.2 per cent in Bolton. A time-lag in the spread of Catholic church and school provision in the suburbs had resulted in secondary clustering in Luton, so that 16.3 per cent of the population of the inner suburban area were Irish-born and 4.1 per cent of the outer. Religious institutions had diffused more evenly through the urban fabric of Bolton and the proportions were 5.2 and 2.3 per cent, respectively.

Those finally contacted included both Irish-born and people of Irish descent who retained an Irish surname. Only 3 of the 89 respondents in Luton had been born in Britain, all being in the second generation. In Bolton, however, 59 of the 115 had been born in Britain, including 29 second-, 23 third-, 6 fourth- and 1 fifth-generation immigrants. Those of Irish descent were asked about a number of factual aspects of their genealogy, that is, including migration history, occupations, marriage partners and religious affiliation. The last two were used as surrogates of structural assimilation in the absence of any primary group information. The Irish-born total (142) gave a longitudinal profile of the migration process from the decision to
leave, through stages of movement to residential settlement within towns. In this chapter, however, interest is restricted to a series of indicators showing the character of primary groups, based on the responses to questions concerning both attitudes and behaviour. Although the results are presented quantitatively, comments and qualifications were encouraged in the interviews and quotations are used to illuminate and extend the figures.

Representatives of primary groups were identified by the technique widely used in sociological research of asking about the ‘three people seen socially most often in the last month’ (Goldthorpe et al. 1969, Richmond 1973). This overcomes the insoluble problem of defining the intensity of friendships, although contact rates alone cannot indicate the subjective meaning attached to different relationships (Allan 1979). It also provides a selected form of ‘personal star’ (Barres 1972) in which best friends are over-represented, and from which several attributes of primary group networks may be measured. These include size, up to a maximum of three, and some aspects of content, namely ethnic composition (nationality), spatial pattern (home address) and nature (kin, friend, workmate).

**Structural assimilation**

The extent to which individuals of Irish descent and Irish birth living in Britain could be regarded as structurally assimilated was assessed, using Gordon’s criterion of ‘large-scale entrance into the primary groups of the majority society’. Although inter-marriage was specified by Gordon as a separate subprocess, which could proceed independently from structural assimilation though it would inevitably follow from it, it was used as the principal surrogate for primary group consent in the case of the descendants.

English-born respondents at least two generations removed from their Irish origins \((n = 30)\), all living in Bolton, were asked about the ethnic group of marriage partners (Irish-born, Irish descent, English, other) as far as such information could accurately be recalled. The results showed that whereas one-third of the immigrant generation were known to have an Irish-born spouse, none of the succeeding generations had married Irish-born people. Approximately two-thirds were known to have married Boltonians with no Irish connections and a maximum of three in any generation had married a spouse also of Irish descent. Outmarriage was accompanied in many cases by lapsing from the Catholic faith. Of the immigrant ancestors, 22 were known to have been Catholic and 2 Protestant, but only 13 of the respondents themselves claimed to be Catholics and 12 were Protestants. Finally, none of the respondents identified themselves as Irish. These findings support the view that first-wave Irish immigrants were rapidly assimilated and made a significant contribution to the social mix of the receiving society. They suggest that the present Catholic proportion of the Bolton population (15 per cent)
understates by at least half the numbers of people of Irish descent, and many
more may have distant kinship ties. For recent arrivals, therefore, the line
between immigrant and majority society is by no means clear cut (Lieberson
1963).

All migrants experience a shrinkage of social network after migration (Bott
1971). For resocialisation to take place, an adequate network must be
re-established in order for norms to be transferred (Eisenstadt 1954). Stability
cannot be achieved while a state of 'anomie' is being experienced (Rex &
Moore 1967). Size of network is thus a crucial index of receptivity to change.
It must be remembered, however, that class differences account for some of
the variation in network size. Members of the working class in Britain typically
have fewer friends than those found in the middle classes. Since respondents in
both towns were concentrated in the manual working groups (social classes
III–V; Luton 89 per cent, Bolton 82 per cent), conformity to social class
norms in Britain would result in relatively attenuated networks. The number
of close friends, defined as those 'seen socially most often in the last month',
was recorded for each subsample. Table 11.1 shows that the majority of the
total sample (56 per cent) could name at least three close friends, and that a
further 20 per cent could name two. However, there was a significant
difference between the two subsamples. In Luton only half (49 per cent) had
well developed networks compared with 67 per cent in Bolton. This may in
part reflect the 'privatised' life-style of affluent workers in Luton, resulting
from an instrumental attitude to work noted by Goldthorpe et al. (1968). A
large number of Irish immigrants in Luton were also isolated from contacts of
any kind, 16 per cent being unable to name any friend and 15 per cent giving
only one, compared with an overall total of only 10 per cent in Bolton. These
respondents were found particularly in the inner core areas of settlement in
Luton and their responses reflected a lack of integration into either community.

Table 11.1 Number of close friends (max. = 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Luton n</th>
<th>Luton %</th>
<th>Bolton n</th>
<th>Bolton %</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>Total %</th>
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NI = no information.

Observe chi-square 9.25; critical value 5% level 7.82.

Table 11.2 Question: Would you say your friends are mostly
Irish or English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Luton n</th>
<th>Luton %</th>
<th>Bolton n</th>
<th>Bolton %</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>Total %</th>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 mostly Irish</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 about the same</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 mostly English</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 all English</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>6 no friends</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
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Observed chi-square 20.83; critical value 5% level 9.49.

'I don't have any friends. I keep to myself.'
(Luton, single male lodger, shiftworker, 8 years in Luton)
'I don't know where they live. They're casual friends except Francis and Pat [both Irish] who live here.'
(Luton, single male lodger, unemployed, 3 years in Luton)
'I don't go out much. I have one friend in Saxon Street, an Irishman from my home area who married an English woman. I knew him before.'
(Luton, married man, 15 years in Luton)

Although single people were significantly over-represented among those who
had no close friends (observed chi-square 4.52, critical value 5 per cent level,
3.84), when those with only one were included the distribution by marital status
(72 per cent married) conforms closely to the proportion married in the total
Luton subsample (71 per cent). The overall proportion married was similar for
Bolton (77 per cent), so that this was unlikely to account for the difference
observed between the two towns.

Limited social interaction with the majority society is clearly illustrated for
those with small networks. In order to examine the extent to which all
respondents remained ethnically enclosed in their friendships, the ethnic origin
of the contacts was recorded. The information was collected in two forms, the
first being an attitudinal measure indicating a general impression of the ethnic
background of friends. Answers were pre-scaled into five classes and given
scores (Table 11.2).

The results show that the average for the sample was 3.2, suggesting no
ethnic bias, but the two subsamples differed significantly. Whereas the Luton
average was slightly towards the Irish end of the scale, the Bolton score was...
Table 11.3 Numbers of non-Irish close friends (max. = 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Luton n</th>
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<th>Bolton n</th>
<th>Bolton %</th>
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<td>total</td>
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NI = no information.
Observed chi-square 19.34; critical value 5% level 7.49.

closest to a ‘mostly English’ response. More than half of the respondents (55 per cent) in Bolton said that their friends were more English than Irish, compared with only 31 per cent in Luton. Only 18 per cent had mostly Irish friends compared with 30 per cent in Luton, where a further 5 per cent had no English friends. A number of factors must be taken into account, however. The Irish-born comprised only 5.9 per cent and 1.8 per cent, respectively, of the total populations of Luton and Bolton, so that a random selection of friends would be ‘mostly English’. Responses may also reflect a desire to conform to a non-discriminatory norm. One respondent replied, ‘it’s all the same to me’, but later revealed that his three closest friends were Irish. Finally, no definition of friend was given so that acquaintances as well as primary group members may have been included. For all these reasons, the responses probably under-state the ethnic bias in friendship groups, though they are a useful guide to general attitudes to the majority society.

A second index of ethnic content of social relationships was drawn from accounts of actual behaviour and focused on a limited range of contacts defined by frequency of meeting. Proportions of non-Irish close friends were calculated (Table 11.3). The overall result suggests a much higher degree of encelure than the attitudes expressed earlier revealed. Two-thirds of the sample (68 per cent) had less than half (0–1) the potential maximum friends outside their group, but whereas over half the Luton subsample (56 per cent) had no English close friends, this was true of only 21 per cent of the Bolton subsample. On the other hand, 50 per cent of the Bolton subsample had well developed networks, including only, or mainly (2–3), English people compared with only 18 per cent in Luton. The high proportion of Irish friends is not explained by the widespread inclusion of kin. In Luton only 11 per cent of contacts mentioned in this context were related, although 59 per cent of the sample had kin living in the town and reported frequent meetings. Presumably, such interactions were taken for granted.

A further behavioural measure concerned the practice and frequency of home visiting. This was designed to test the intensity of friendships mentioned and to determine one aspect of their spatial context. Again, however, cultural and class norms must be taken into account before conclusions are drawn. The majority of respondents (85 per cent) were from rural backgrounds in Ireland. In the past, home visiting had been customary, at least for men. ‘Night walking’ to rotating venues among peer groups was common (Arensberg & Kimball 1968). But subsequent studies have reported a reduction in this kind of informal contact as a result of increasing contact with urbanization during the postwar period, so that neighbours rarely saw inside each other’s houses (Limerick Rural Survey 1962, Brody 1973). In Britain class norms again differ substantially. Whereas the middle classes frequently entertain at home and, indeed, deliberately remove friendships from the constraints of their original setting in this way, working class sociability does not ‘flower out’ from specific contexts of meeting and home visiting is restricted to ‘popping in’ for a chat or the provision of day-to-day aid (Allan 1979). Young and Willmott (1962), for example, found that only one-third of their sample in the East End of London had friends with whom they were on visiting terms. Conformity to British norms would therefore suggest restricted activity in both towns.

The responses again indicated the gap between generalised feelings and revealed behaviour (Table 11.4). Although 51 per cent had said that their friends were mostly or all English, only 30 per cent frequently visited English homes. Nearly half the Luton sample never visited, though the proportion declined sharply from 67 per cent in the central core to none in the outer suburban area. In Bolton, however, only 20 per cent never visited and the highest subarea proportion was 33 per cent. As suggested above, conformity to neighbourhood norms may explain these findings. This was indeed expressed by some respondents.

‘We never visit. The English don’t do that.’
(Bolton, married couple, arrived 1956–57)

‘I never visit – only in Ireland. I’ve never done that here.’
(Luton, single man, lodger, arrived direct 1955)

Nevertheless it is likely that meetings in the home provide the greatest opportunity for informal exchange of information leading to adaptation of norms.

Friendship formation is the key to changes in primary group composition which will lead to structural assimilation. Inclusion of people from another ethnic group among close friends not only implies shared norms, but is the context within which transference of information by example may take place most thoroughly and with least stress. Evidence presented so far suggests that
the two subsamples had reached different stages in the process. The Luton Irish community as a whole had not reached the stage of 'large-scale entrance into the primary groups of the majority society'. The pattern of extensive external contacts typical of fully socialized residents had not yet been re-established. Moreover, even among those naming three close friends, 69 per cent included two or more Irish people. Both attitudinal and behavioural measures suggest a considerable degree of ethnic concurrence typical of Rex and Moore's (1967) stage two, so that the group as a whole must be regarded as integrated on plural lines. Thus the presence of friends and relatives ranked high among reasons for satisfaction with Luton as a place to live.

'My mates are here.'
(Luton, married man, arrived Britain 1957, came to Luton 1968)

'There are many Irish here. It feels homely. I know people.'
(Luton, single woman, arrived Britain 1972, came to Luton 1973)

In Bolton, on the other hand, it may be argued that structural assimilation had been achieved for the group as a whole. Social networks were well developed and included a majority of non-Irish members. This corresponds more closely to stages four and five of Rex and Moore's model. More references to the friendliness of the population as a whole were included in reasons for satisfaction with the town.

'You couldn't find more friendly people.'
(Bolton, married woman, arrived direct 1957)

'They're the nicest people in England.'
(Bolton, married couple, arrived in Britain 1951, 56, came to Bolton 1957, 58)

The findings suggest that degree of assimilation is place specific, so that no general conclusions can be drawn concerning the Irish in Britain. The sample totals could only be interpreted as an aggregate of two contrasting case studies. Since the towns were selected to represent distinctive types of Irish settlement in Britain, however, it may be possible to interpret the differences observed in the light of length of settlement. Moreover, piecemeal evidence from other sources lends support to these regional contrasts. Marked similarities with Luton were reported from Birmingham by a journalist who found 'only the beginning of social or geographical integration' (Harrison 1973). In an oral history account of St Helens (Forman 1979), on the other hand, a miner recalling young Irishmen arriving in the 1920s commented: 'Many of these men are now assimilated in the area. They're married and they're all Lancashire people in effect.'

Reasons for these differences must now be considered. One possible explanation is that different social attitudes have developed among the majority society. Where exposure to an ethnic group has occurred over several generations, especially in the absence of social tension and widespread acceptance of inter-marriage, subsequent immigrants may experience a greater degree of acceptance on the part of the receiving groups. It is difficult to measure such attitudes objectively, but various indirect indicators may be used. Content analysis of local weekly newspapers was carried out for the years 1961 and 1971. All references to the Irish and other ethnic groups were noted. The most striking result was an absence of direct references to the Irish community and its activities in the Luton News. Although Catholic church attendances were higher than Protestant ones, no Catholic parish news was reported and even major events in the calendar were passed by. For 3 months in 1961, however, an active and sometimes bitter correspondence continued over the educational 'apartheid' principle of separate Catholic schooling as well as doctrinal matters. In the Bolton Journal and Guardian, by contrast, Catholic parishes had sections of equal status with Protestant ones, and Irish activities, such as St Patrick's Night celebrations, received full and sympathetic coverage. Although editorial policy must be considered, the findings suggest that the Luton Irish community was excluded from local press coverage and must have found alternative outlets for advertising and circulation of news. The role of newspapers in influencing as well as reflecting the views of their readers must also be remembered.

Irish respondents were asked for their perceptions of town and neighbourhood friendliness as a general indication of their feelings of acceptance (Table 11.5). Clearly, there was a marked difference in the opinions expressed in the two towns. At both urban and neighbourhood level, Bolton was perceived to be much more friendly, 92 and 86 per cent of respondents, respectively, expressing positive reactions. In Luton, by contrast, although the majority believed that people were at least 'quite friendly', a considerable proportion at the urban level had definitely negative feelings (31 per cent). For some at least this had the effect of reinforcing internal community ties.
Table 11.5 Question: Do you think that on the whole this is (a) a friendly town and (b) a friendly neighbourhood?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Bolton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very friendly</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite friendly</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite unfriendly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very unfriendly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don't know</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very friendly</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite friendly</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite unfriendly</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very unfriendly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don't know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Observed chi-square 34.45, critical value 5% level, 4 degrees of freedom 9.49.
(b) Observed chi-square 14.43, critical value 5% level, 3 degrees of freedom 7.82.
NI = no information.

'Very friendly in this town, so I stay with the Irish.'
(Luton, married woman, arrived 1960 from Cheshire)

But although such opinions were expressed more strongly in areas with lower proportions of Irish-born residents, it is not possible to attribute them to a lack of acceptance of Irish people in the town. Again, it may be a reflection of the 'privatisation' resulting from the rapid influx of migrants from all parts of Britain in the postwar period. This was supported by one respondent who said:

'It's rather an unfriendly town. Even the Irish are not very friendly. Everyone keeps themselves to themselves.'
(Luton, married man, arrived 1972 from London)

Nevertheless, impressions of neighbourhood friendliness were somewhat higher, only 16 per cent feeling that they lived in an unfriendly neighbourhood. The contrast was brought out by a respondent from the heart of the 'secondary' area, who was probably referring to her Irish neighbours.

'It's rather unfriendly. Both English and Irish that is. Both parents work and have no time to be friendly. But this street is very friendly.'
(Luton, married woman, arrived 1963 from Nottingham)

The differing histories of settlement in the two towns may also affect present-day relationships in other ways. The rapid expansion of 'second wave' immigrants in Luton has provided potentially greater support for ethnic institutions, which in turn help to increase intra-ethnic contact. In the early 1970s, in addition to a large Irish club, the Luton community supported two hurling teams, two flourishing branches of Comhaltas na Eireann, the cultural association fostering Irish music and dancing, and de facto Irish clubs attached to each of the seven Catholic parishes. Bolton had no specifically Irish activities of this kind. Greater numbers also provided a larger pool of neighbours, friends and marriage partners. Together these factors may help to explain the different degree of endogamous marriage in the two towns. Table 11.6 confirms that endogamy was significantly greater in Luton, though similar proportions of each subsample were married (Luton 71 per cent, Bolton 77 per cent) and had arrived as single people (Luton 69 per cent, Bolton 64 per cent). When partners who met after migration are considered, the difference was even more pronounced, 71 per cent of the Luton married sample having Irish-born spouses compared with only 38 per cent in Bolton. Moreover, 33 per cent in Bolton had married a person with no Irish connection, compared with only 8 per cent in Luton.

Table 11.6 Ethnic background of spouse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Bolton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both Irish-born</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>met in Ireland</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>met in Britain</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>met elsewhere</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one Irish-born spouse</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self migrated as child spouse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-Irish spouse</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observed chi-square 13.11.
Another factor could be the greater average length of residence of Irish respondents in Bolton (22 years) compared with Luton (12 years), though the distribution by period of arrival in the two towns was not significantly different at the 5% per cent level. Scores for responses to the attitudinal question on the ethnic mix of friends indicate a general, though not regular, increase with length of residence in Britain (Table 11.7). For each period, however, the Bolton scores were higher, often substantially so, than those of the Luton Irish-born, suggesting that variation in individual assimilation was not sufficient to account for the differences between the two towns.

Finally, the longer-established Bolton Irish-born residents had fewer kin living in the town. At least one related household was reported by 46 per cent of households, though a further 11 per cent had lost local kin through death or further migration. In the Luton subsample, 59 per cent had kin living in the town. Other researchers have concluded that the presence of kin retards assimilation by reinforcing the norms of the society of origin and reducing contact with the receiving society (Rose & Warshaw 1957). This might be particularly applicable to Irish immigrants since kin dominate primary groups in rural Ireland ( Arensberg & Kimball 1968). But when the association between presence of kin and degree of structural assimilation, indicated by opinion of ethnic mix of friends and the practice of home visiting in Luton was measured, the reverse was found to be true. Those without kin were less likely to visit English homes (observed chi-square 6.93, critical value 5.99) or to have English friends (observed chi-square 5.83, critical value 5.99). Kin may thus have passed on some measure of their own achieved assimilation and provided a 'springboard' from which to enter the wider society.

It would seem, therefore, that apart from variations in size of community, whose effects are difficult to isolate in a study based on two cases, attributes of the immigrants themselves do not explain the difference in degree of assimilation confirmed by each of the indices. Longer exposure to Irish immigration appears to have blurred the religious and inherited cultural divide in Bolton, reducing the sharp distinction from the remainder of the population experienced by Irish immigrants in Luton. Whereas Irish accents heard on the streets, the colonisation of particular pubs and the appearance of new Catholic churches and schools are recent intrusions into an albeit increasingly heterogeneous population in Luton, in Bolton they have been commonplace for several generations and, indeed, more widespread in the past.

**Spatial pattern of primary groups**

The residential distribution of primary group members is an indication of the relative importance of the neighbourhood as the milieu for establishing close social contacts, or at least for their maintenance. If the majority of close friends named by the respondents are also neighbours, then support is given to the widely held belief that ethnic clustering leads to and perpetuates social segregation. Those living in dense ethnic residential clusters will have a higher proportion of neighbours and therefore friends of the same background, though where densities are low a considerable latitude of choice may still be exercised. If members of primary groups are widely spread, however, there are fewer constraints on selection. Those who are of the same ethnic group are selected, it must be concluded that an urban rather than neighbourhood community exists. Residential proximity does not therefore play a major role in the assimilation process and any spatial clustering is likely to have resulted from factors other than the preference of the ethnic group. Similarly, scattered networks of friends outside the group reduce the importance of residential distribution as an active influence on ethnic interaction.

When the pattern of friends' home addresses is mapped for the two towns, some similarities may be seen in the overall numerical distribution (Fig. 11.4). In both cases, about one-third were located in the interview area and a further quarter within the radius of approximately 1 km (Table 11.8). The remaining 40 per cent were widely scattered and a small number (Luton 7, Bolton 8) lived in neighbouring towns. Thus, though dispersed friends may reflect residential movement (Beshers 1962), present proximity was not essential for the maintenance of significant social ties.

In each town the proportion of Irish-born among close friends was considerably higher than would be expected from a random distribution, taking account of proportions of each group present. Whereas in Bolton the highest proportion of Irish-born (56 per cent) was in the extended neighbourhood of the surrounding grid squares, in Luton it was in the remainder of the town (72 per cent). At the level of the interview area, however, there was no positive correlation between density of Irish-born population and...
Figure 11.4 Map of (a) Luton and (b) Bolton showing distribution of three closest friends by interview area. The numbers in the grid squares refer to total numbers of close friends present in separate households. Thus in (a), four close friends of respondents in area 1 lived in G6.
Table 11.8  Spatial distribution of people’s close friends within the towns (max. = 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Area (enumeration district)</th>
<th>Luton</th>
<th>Bolton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>% Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surrounding grid squares</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>37 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remainder of town</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observed chi-square 1.37, critical value, 5% level 3.84.

of Irish friends (Kendall's τ 0.14). In fact, the highest proportion was found in the area of lowest density in each town, suggesting a greater tendency to select Irish friends where respondents were outnumbered more strongly. However, the next highest proportion in each case was found in the central core area, supporting the clustering-social segregation thesis.

In Luton the proportion of Irish-born friends increased with distance from home, indicating the existence of a 'non-place' Irish community, at least at the neighbourhood level (Webber 1964). Although the clustering of Irish people into certain neighbourhoods had created opportunities for meeting Irish friends, these were not the only forms of ethnic contact. Moreover, dispersed ties were not related to the maintenance of links with others from the place of origin though this has been suggested elsewhere (Rex & Moore 1967). The respondents knew the whereabouts of other individuals and families from their home area in Ireland, but did not necessarily include them among close friends.

'There's one woman from home [Dublin] living in Farley Hill. I meet her downtown and have a chat, but I don't go to see her.

(Luton, married woman, arrived 1955 from Nottingham)

'There are six to eight families [Co. Monaghan] but I don't arrange to meet them.'

(Luton, married man, arrived Luton 1956 from London)

The network of kinship ties was even more widely dispersed than that of friends (Fig. 11.5). In Luton 19 per cent lived in the interview area, and 60 per cent were located outside the surrounding grid squares. Only two children remained in the same area after marriage, the remainder being located on the newer estates on the outskirts. However, distance seemed to have little effect on the frequency of visiting (cf. Sutcz 1973), though only those who lived very close met daily. The majority met at least once a week.

The Irish community in Luton, therefore, seemed to be maintained at an urban rather than a neighbourhood scale, significant numbers of primary group members living at some distance from the respondents' homes. But the inclusion of more non-Irish elements in the neighbourhood suggests that resocialization through intensive external social contact might be taking place in this area. The findings for Bolton, on the other hand, offered no support for the existence of an extended Irish community. There was a slight decline in the ethnic proportion with distance, though this could reflect the overall distribution of the Irish-born in the town. Non-Irish friendships were maintained in all areas of the town, indicating structural assimilation at both neighbourhood and urban levels, and according with the widespread perception of friendliness recorded earlier.

Conclusions

Primary group analysis is a valuable measure of social relationships between immigrants and other members of society, because it concerns the process by which change takes place. Resocialization to the norms of the receiving country is brought about by intense, informal contact outside the ethnic group. These findings suggest, however, that the process does not take place simply at the individual level, but is significantly affected by the characteristics of particular locations. Although it is not possible to weigh up the various factors involved, tradition of immigration in a settlement appears to influence present attitudes to new arrivals. Both structural and social links, strengthened over time, have eased the path of subsequent migrants. However, the connections between primary group membership and neighbourhood are complex and need further investigation. Propinquity appeared to play an important part, but by no means all close friends lived in the neighbourhood. Moreover, respondents living in least Irish areas were not always the most structurally assimilated, although those with least developed and predominantly Irish social networks were generally found in areas of higher concentration.

The degree of structural assimilation displayed by Irish respondents in Bolton confirms the widely held belief (Patterson 1963, Rose et al. 1969, Johnston 1971) that the Irish in Britain have lost their separate identity over time. This does not confirm the view that Irish immigration was not assimilated because of the large number of recent arrivals, but suggests that the process of assimilation had occurred many years earlier.
which suggests that pluralistic integration is the expected ‘mode of coaptation of migrants’ in industrial societies. During two centuries of industrialisation, the Irish in Bolton have become identifiable only fragmentedly by name and religion.

Yet time has context as well as duration. The experience may not necessarily be projected on to the Luton Irish nor yet the West Indian populations. Changes in the rate of structural assimilation or even regression could occur. In 1975, for example, reports in the national press (see, for example, The Times 17 January 1975) described a ‘backlash’ of antipathy towards Irish communities in Britain following IRA bombing campaigns, though respondents claimed not to have experienced this personally. Increasing levels of unemployment could also generate resentment against all immigrant workers. Thus although the epithet ‘toasted Irish’ for the West Indian community carries with it the implication of rapid assimilation, this may be neither universal nor inevitable.

Notes

1 Rate of community growth (birth place totals), sex ratios and proportions born in Northern Ireland.
2 Those born in the Irish Republic (119) and Northern Ireland (23) were treated as a single sample because of the small totals. DespiteBoal’s (1976) comments on the lack of ethnic homogeneity of the Irish in London, many similarities were found in the structure and motivation of those interviewed (Walter 1979). However, the difference in class structure of the total populations must be borne in mind. In 1971, 44.9 per cent of those born in the Republic of Ireland were classified in Socio-Economic Groups IV and V compared with only 36.7 per cent of those from Northern Ireland.

References

Census of England and Wales 1921. General tables, Table 52.
Census of England and Wales 1951. General tables, Table 39.
Census of England and Wales 1971. Great Britain country of birth tables, Table 3.