

## Chapter 8

# Migrants and Descendants: Multi-Generations of the Irish in London in the 21st Century

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### Introduction

The Irish were the largest birthplace group in London from outside Britain until 2001. However the position changed rapidly between 2001 and 2011 when the ranking of the Irish fell sharply to fourth overall by birthplace amongst the incomers, after Indians, Poles and Pakistanis, and ninth by ethnic group. In 2012–13 Irish were placed only eleventh for new migrants seeking National insurance numbers in Britain, many fewer than Poles, Lithuanians, Hungarians, Italians or Portuguese, though of course some young Irish people will have worked in London previously (Kennedy et al., 2014: 26–7). But Irish migration to London has a much longer history and Irish experiences offer an unusual opportunity also to explore multi-generational ethnic identities as they persist, hybridise and lose visibility over time.

Tony Murray describes ways in which ‘The Irish have been deeply woven into the fabric of London life for centuries’ (2012: 21). Irish settlement in London was recorded in the Middle Ages, becoming more permanent in the Elizabethan period (MacRaild, 1999: 1). Numbers increased in the 18th century, especially in the area of St Giles, part of Holborn, with outer settlements in the east of the city, Whitechapel and Southwark. From the early 19th century numbers in the centre continued to expand. Although London is now the prime destination of the emigrants from Ireland, with nearly half the total by 2010–11, before the mid-20th century other parts of Britain had larger shares especially North West England and the West of Scotland. In 1841 only 18.0 per cent of the total share was located in London, falling to 11.8 per cent in 1871 (MacRaild, 1999: 55).

Far from being a long-settled group with a fading historic background the Irish population is therefore constantly replenished by succeeding ‘waves’, often precipitated by cycles in the Irish economy which have had emigration as a ‘safety valve’ for large numbers of unemployed people (Mac Laughlin, 1997). The latest inflow followed the collapse of the Celtic Tiger economy after 2006. This wave shares many of the characteristics of previous flows, but with a much greater

concentration of the highly-educated whose careers in Ireland were abruptly stalled in the middle of the 2000s (Irial et al., 2013).

As a consequence of the longevity of links with London and the changing social and economic character of migrants, the Irish 'community' is very diverse. It includes a great variety of degrees of settledness amongst both migrants and generations of English-born descendants. The Irish have interacted and intersected with many other migrant groups over time, in the process becoming an important part of the 'mainstream' as well as the wider multi-cultural mix.

### **Present-Day Settlement: A 2011 Census Portrait**

The 2011 Census allows us to identify key demographic and socio-economic features of the present-day Irish population in London, map its changing locations and identify related policy issues. An additional source of diversity is the inclusion of migrants from two jurisdictions, the Republic and Northern Ireland. This analysis includes both parts of the island where possible, drawing attention to differences which arise from migrants' social, economic and political backgrounds, including political and religious affiliations. Importantly statistics are collected in different ways in the Republic of Ireland and the UK so that findings from the two parts of the island cannot necessarily be aggregated or compared to provide a full picture (Walter, 2008: 184–5).

The Census data show that the total Irish-born population in London in 2011 was 162,581, of whom 80.1 per cent were born in the Irish Republic and 19.9 per cent in Northern Ireland. A much higher proportion of the total Republic Irish-born population in England is located in London, 34.2 per cent compared with 17.5 per cent of those from Northern Ireland. Larger proportions born in Northern Ireland have settled in the North West, the Outer South East, East and South West of England.

Year of arrival in the UK is one of the statistics provided for Republic-born migrants only. This confirms that in the period 2001–2011 numbers rose sharply to 25,914 after a comparative lull in the 1990s when only 11,891 arrived. The Republic-born population in London consists of three main 'waves' in the post-Second World War period so that of the present-day population, almost half arrived before 1970, a smaller 'bulge' of 15 per cent in the large Irish recession of the 1980s and a further 20 per cent in the most recent decade. This pattern has very strong implications for the character and experiences of the population as a whole, suggesting that age and period of arrival are another important source of internal diversity.

Data are also available on age at arrival in the UK of Republic-born people resident in London. Of those living in the city in 2011, 72.5 per cent were aged 24 years or younger when they arrived, with a smaller proportion (20.5 per cent) aged between 25 and 34. This tells us that the large number of older Irish-born people have been resident for almost all their adult lives and are therefore very long-

settled members of London's population. It also confirms that the latest 'wave' of arrivals between 2001 and 2011 are young people in their 20s and 30s. There are thus at least two important categories of the Republic Irish-born – the long-settled born before 1945, many of whom will be parents and grandparents to London-born second- and third- generations – and the young, much newer arrivals who may or may not be settled in London or established in families.

Yet although there was a sharp increase in new arrivals between 2001 and 2011, overall the number of the Irish Republic-born in London fell by 17.5 per cent, a higher rate of decline than for the Northern Irish-born (-12.8 per cent). This reflects two processes which are specific to the Republic-born and partly explain the changing location of the Irish in the numerical hierarchy of migrants in London. One is high levels of mortality in the ageing 1950s generation. At the same time new arrivals have not increased as fast as in other groups, especially those from Poland. However a second factor is return movement to Ireland, which is not captured by the UK Census (Irial et al., 2013: 76). The Celtic Tiger economic boom was still attracting young and middle-aged returners from London in the early years of the 21st century, though this rapidly declined after 2006.

Within London the Irish-born are scattered throughout the city, but also strongly clustered by borough. The six with the largest Republic-born populations are contiguous west of the centre, in three Inner London boroughs Islington (2.8 per cent Irish-born), Hammersmith and Fulham (2.7 per cent), Camden (2.4 per cent), and the adjacent Outer London boroughs of Brent (2.9 per cent), Ealing (2.3 per cent) and Harrow (2.1 per cent). These have been 'Irish' areas of London throughout the post-1945 period, with a gradual outward shift reflecting rising owner-occupation and movement away from inner city renting. The Northern Irish-born share a higher concentration in the Inner London boroughs but have not participated in the outward movement to the same extent (see Chapter 2, p. 14, Figure 2.1).

Birthplace data helps to paint a demographic portrait of the Irish groups, but a much fuller range of socio-economic statistics is available for the White Irish ethnic group. This category was first included in 2001 after a sustained campaign by Irish welfare and community groups who argued that the Irish had been disadvantaged by exclusion from the new ethnic category introduced in 1991 (Walter, 1998). This precluded recognition of specific Irish need, for example in ethnic monitoring exercises aimed to identify discrimination and disadvantage, as well as for funding in areas such as housing and health (Hickman and Walter, 1997).

However the composition of the White Irish category is complex to interpret, especially in 2011 when the ethnic categories were changed so that 'Northern Irish' became part of the 'White British' category. Many Northern Irish-born people who ticked 'White Irish' in 2001 may have changed to this category in 2011 hindering accurate analyses of trends over time. Over 80 per cent of those born in the Republic ticked White Irish in both censuses, whereas only 22.7 per cent of those born in Northern Ireland did so in 2011 compared with 36.8 per cent in 2001. This must be borne in mind when the findings are considered. As will be discussed later, one per cent of people born in England also identified as

White Irish, presumed to be second- or third-generation Irish people who chose this identification.

Bearing in mind these inclusions and exclusions from the White Irish category, levels of qualification by ethnic group point up some important characteristics of the group. As expected from their periods of arrival, the White Irish are recorded at both ends of the socio-economic scale. They have the largest proportion of any ethnic group with no qualifications, if the very small 'White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller' category, which also of course includes Irish people, is removed. Amongst those aged 16 and over in the main ethnic groups, 26.1 per cent of the White Irish have no qualifications, substantially more than 20.9 per cent of the White British and well above those identifying in Asian (1.2 per cent) and Black (14.3 per cent) categories. In part this reflects the much older age structure of the Irish-born, many of whom arrived in London with very basic schooling. It also relates to the types of 'unskilled' work for which the Irish were recruited, men in heavy manual labour and women in domestic work.

At the other extreme, in 2011 the White Irish had close to the highest levels of tertiary level qualifications. In total 37.3 per cent had degrees or equivalent, almost identical to the White British and exceeded only by White Others with 42.5 per cent and Asians with 39.7 per cent. If age was taken into account the higher levels of education amongst the White Irish would be much more apparent. The young age profile of White Others for example is signalled by their low levels of retirement, 6.2 per cent compared with 26 per cent of the White Irish, the highest all groups.

These two broad categories of migrants, the older group employed in, or retired from, manual work, and the young, well-educated 'high flyers' have very different profiles and make contrasting contributions to, and demands on, life in London. But it must not be forgotten that new arrivals still include young people with few qualifications who continue a very long tradition of 'escaping' from unemployment or low-paid, insecure jobs in Ireland (Mac Laughlin, 1997; Walls, 2005; Tilki et al., 2009). Unemployment in the Republic grew from around five per cent in the mid-2000s to over 15 per cent in 2011. There are also other welfare needs which may be available in London, such as women needing access to abortions, legally even more restricted from 2014 in the Irish Republic (Rossiter, 2009; *Guardian*, 2014). Thus there are clear threads of continuity over time as well as sharp alterations in direction matching fast-changing economic contexts.

Young professional people from Ireland see their stay in London very differently from earlier generations. For many this is part of a wider global pattern of mobility rather than a permanent move. Moreover some are 'Eurocommuters' who return to permanent homes in Ireland on a regular, perhaps even weekly basis, either by lifestyle choice or the necessity of remaining in a negatively-mortgaged house in Ireland (Ralph, 2014). A recent report has examined the recruitment of Irish teachers to British schools, many of those interviewed being based in London (Ryan et al., 2014). Using qualitative methods including interviews and a discussion group, the research found that 68 per cent gave 'no

jobs in Ireland' as their main reason for leaving. Most had arrived after 2010 and their average age was 28. They were part of the extensive Irish diaspora, about 60 per cent having links of family and friends in Britain and one-sixth had previously worked in another country, mainly the US, Australia and New Zealand. A number anticipated further moves in future. On average they returned to Ireland four times a year and only about 30 per cent expected to stay at least five years or even permanently.

This occupational group illustrates many of the characteristics of other post-Celtic Tiger young professional migrants in London. In contrast to the older, long-established Irish migrants, recent arrivals did not have links with Irish community groups and welfare organisations. But they continued to live in 'Irish worlds' to some extent, frequently socialising with Irish friends and taking part in Gaelic Athletic Association activities. Although it is widely assumed that anti-Irish racism is no longer expressed in Britain, 34 per cent of the teachers said that they had encountered anti-Irish sentiment, although this was considerably stronger outside London which was seen as much more accepting of ethnic diversity.

However, by far the largest section of the migrant population is aged over 55. Relatively few of the 1950s and 1960s cohort returned to Ireland in the 1970s when economic conditions improved. By then many had started to raise families, were buying their own homes and had become established in their jobs. Unlike recent migrants there was much less fluidity in their movements, both because of travel costs and greater rigidity in employment patterns. Over a quarter of the White Irish are now retired, and another important section are in the pre-retirement age group (50–59 for women and 50–64 for men), a very different pattern from other ethnic groups in London. Although there is considerable variation in the lives of this population, overall those from the Republic are more likely to take part in Irish community and cultural events and to have specific socio-economic characteristics and cultural needs. Qualitative research in the Borough of Brent showed this has led to the development of a 'community saved', with a strong internal cohesion based on shared cultural values (Malone, 2001). By contrast migrants from Northern Ireland were less likely to engage with 'Irish diaspora culture', perceiving this to be 'Catholic, Southern Irish or working class' (Devlin Trew, 2013: 117).

Although many long-established Irish-born people in London made adequate livings, ensuring that their children were well-educated and could be upwardly mobile, not all succeeded in this way. A report entitled *The Forgotten Irish* was completed in 2009 and identified key areas of ongoing need for support (Tilki et al., 2009). The major differences from the British population as a whole included: larger proportions single and living alone, long-term health problems or disabilities, a history of working in occupations with health risks, poor housing conditions and living in areas of multiple deprivation. In particular men who had worked 'on the buildings' experienced isolation and poverty, often building lives around the pub, with attendant dangers of alcohol misuse (Leavey et al., 2004: 775). Mainstream care providers frequently showed cultural insensitivity,

related to the long history of anti-Irish racism. In many ways, therefore, the Irish have specific needs as long-term migrants, which continues to set them apart from more recent arrivals in London.

The invisibility of this section of the population both in London and in Ireland was highlighted by a very influential documentary entitled *Lost Generation* broadcast by RTÉ in the respected *Primetime* slot just before Christmas 2003 (Rouse, 2003; Department of Foreign Affairs, 2014). The filming showed extreme poverty amongst older Irish men in London, Coventry and Manchester causing a public outcry in Ireland. It demonstrated the failure of the Irish Government to honour the promise of greater financial support to emigrants in need, made in 2002 following the Report of the Task Force on Policy Regarding Emigrants (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2002). The showing forced the announcement of a change in policy and led to the establishment of the Irish Abroad Unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs. In 2005 the amount allocated to the Irish voluntary sector in Britain, was doubled to nearly £6 million pounds, resulting in substantial increases in funding to community and welfare groups in London (*Irish Post*, 2004b).

A section of the Irish population which is particularly invisible is Travellers. Although they were included as an ethnic group in the 2011 Census for the first time, there was undoubtedly serious undercounting. Those whose presence was recorded as 'White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller' numbered 8,196 in London and had very distinctive features (Ryan et al., 2014: 16–17, 22–7). They included large numbers of children, over one third of the population being aged 0–15. Conversely less than four per cent were aged 65 or over, indicating very high rates of early mortality. Just over half (54.3 per cent) had no qualifications, compared with 17.6 per cent average for all ethnic groups. In total 35.9 per cent were recorded as 'never worked and long-term unemployed' compared with 5.6 per cent of the White Irish. This population had the highest rates of limiting long-term illness and those aged 50+ who rated their general health as 'bad' or 'very bad', and by far the largest proportions in prisons.

The Irish-born population in London is very diverse, but there are distinctive features which have persisted over time. Until the recent arrival of large numbers of East Europeans there has been a tendency to overlook 'white' migrants in surveys of London's incomers. But the Irish share many aspects of the positionings and experiences of those acknowledged as minority ethnic groups as well as intermixing with them in later generations.

## Second-Generation Irish Identities in London

Recognition of the Irish as an ethnic group is relatively recent. The Greater London Council made the historic step of including the Irish in minority ethnic community funding initiatives in 1984 (Greater London Council, 1984). But by 1994 only 14 local authorities in London included the Irish as a category in monitoring

procedures. Awareness of the issue was boosted by the publication in 1997 of the Commission for Racial Equality report *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain* which used London as one of its major case studies (Hickman and Walter, 1997). An important outcome was the inclusion of White Irish as a separate ethnic group in the 2001 Census.

Whereas birthplace references only those born in Ireland, ethnicity potentially captures their English-born children, grandchildren and even more distant descendants who choose this identity. However, despite great efforts on the part of Irish organisations in the lead-in to the 2001 and especially the 2011 Census, only a small proportion is captured in the White Irish category. Most people of Irish descent do not tick this box, either because the wording confusingly points them towards White British as their national affiliation or because recognition of a 'second-generation Irish' identity is not encouraged in Britain (Hickman et al., 2005; Walter, 2005/6; Hickman, 2011). Some of course may prefer to identify as English, perhaps having lost strong family connections with Ireland.

Only 49,000 people born in England and living in London in 2011 ticked White Irish, compared with 162,581 Irish migrants who did so, so that they constituted just under a quarter of the total (Ryan et al., 2014: 12). Yet estimates show that children of at least one Irish parent outnumber the Irish-born at least twice and so the number could potentially have been closer to 330,000 (Hickman et al., 2001). The most accurate enumeration of parents' birthplaces in the UK was in a single Census, 1971. This showed that 241,220 people living in London at that time were born in the Irish Republic and 515,310 residents had an Irish parent giving a ratio of slightly over 2:1. An even greater proportion was recorded in 2004 when a Greater London Authority representative and weighted sample survey of London residents found that 11 per cent had at least one parent born in either part of Ireland and 19 per cent had a grandparent born there (*Irish Post*, 2004a). Including both first and second generations, as is commonly the case for other minority ethnic groups, would place the Irish higher up the list numerically, close to the Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean group which numbered 344,597.

The absence of census data and the complexity of identities in the second generation means that qualitative material is most useful in exploring British-born Irish generations. The most extensive was the ESRC-funded research study entitled *The second-generation Irish: a hidden population in multi-ethnic Britain* (2000–2), known as the *Irish 2 Project*. This explored senses of identity of people with Irish parents, selecting five locations of which London was one. Qualitative methods were used, including focus groups with target populations (professional women, professional men, mothers and people of mixed ethnic parentage) and 25 individual interviews based on demographic, socio-economic and cultural quotas. Most participants were in their 30s and 40s, the children of the 'bulge' of postwar migrants in the 1950s. The findings go some way to explain the apparent low rate of claiming Irish identities in the 2001 and 2011 Censuses.

Discussing the issue of identity, focus group members strongly asserted their ongoing senses of Irishness, but explained the difficulties in expressing this in the face of English people's denials and accusations of inauthenticity from people in Ireland. The key 'proof' laid down by both challenging groups was the lack of an Irish accent. Many *Irish 2* participants had decided that the best description of their ethnic identity was 'London Irish', a diasporic term which hybridised their family origins and their personal background. In the professional men's group there was broad agreement about this.

Finbarr: I was born here, been brought up in London and I feel, I feel more of a relationship to London, rather than the United Kingdom. But I am Irish, I can't help it. I can't deny that. It's the blood that's been passed down.

Seamus agreed:

Seamus: I'm not Irish Irish but I'm very, well I'm London Irish and I'm proud of my London roots as well, but as your man here says, it's just a London thing.

Moderator: Yeah.

Seamus: 'Cause I was, went to school here, you know, I went, I was confirmed here, I went to church here but it was always going back home to Ireland for every holiday. We were sent back for six weeks. So that was, I think that's, that was a good thing as well because I've got friends similar background to my own, but their mother and father didn't, they probably lost their religion or something. But religion was important to me growing up because, you know, it was all part of being Irish. And seeing friends and that so, you know, but yeah certainly not British that's, that's what I'm like. Not that I'm anti-British, it's just that it's not me.

Moderator: Yeah.

Seamus: That's, that's how I feel comfortable describing my own self.

Seamus's elaboration brings out many aspects of the London childhoods of Irish migrants' children. It has already been shown that there was distinctive geographical clustering in the inner west London boroughs so that local Catholic church attendance and schooling brought together children of a similar background. Moreover frequent visits to Ireland, especially in the school holidays also reinforced connections with families in Ireland (Walter, 2013).

However self-description as 'London Irish' may not be without problems for the second generation. Malone and Dooley (2006), drew on focus group discussions with eight women in Brent to argue that the second generation feel much less anchored in their neighbourhoods than their migrant parents.



The London Irish women, in marked contrast, are self-perceived outsiders from both mainstream British society and, in particular, from the current urban life given their stated preoccupation with the desired or imagined environment of a rural Ireland of their own memories of summer holidays, their 'inherited memories and recollections of their parents or – rather more likely – a bit of both'. (p. 23)

In particular the second-generation participants lacked the practical and emotional support of belonging to a migrant network, leading to a greater sense of anonymity in the city.

But the second generation is also placed within a larger picture of multiple ethnic settlement in London, especially as their inner city neighbourhoods are homes both to other migrant groups as well as the settled English or British populations. Their substantial numbers and long-established family connections as well as their joint inside/outside status have provided a distinctive location within the ethnic mix. In certain situations, one consequence of long settlement can be the establishment of strategic alliances between different minority ethnic groups. As Hickman et al. (2013) report:

In Kilburn, the shared experiences of discrimination and migration of African Caribbean long-term residents and their Irish counterparts were cited by interviewees from both groups as the source of the ease with which these two groups were able to live together.

An illustration of this 'identity alliance' was given by a young long-term settled Irish man:

It's Irish and Caribbean youngsters, and they do round here, which is quite confusing, not like anywhere else they plot together. And here in Stonebridge they plot together. They hang round together. Whereas in Hackney or somewhere like that, or New Cross in Lewisham, or whatever, there is big Irish communities and Caribbeans that live next to each other but they don't mix. But here for some reason they mix ... I sort of know why, it's, you know, back ages and ages ago when everyone came over, some Irish people would buy up and then let Caribbeans stay. And then some Caribbeans would buy up and let Irish stay. So it's a sort of mutual respect thing. From Ladbrooke Grove it started up and just moved up towards here like. (2013: 154)

As the participant suggests, Kilburn presents an unusual case of cooperation and respect between the Irish and Caribbean populations. Areas with fewer Irish people, or a different social status, had less positive relationships between groups. John Walsh, in his memoir *The Falling Angels* (2000) describes his Irish mother's sharp exchange with the driver of an old car who was about to place it unhelpfully on her doctor husband's parking space in Battersea, south of the Thames.

She strode over to the Austin, where the driver was yanking on the brake and rapped sharply on the window. A black face looked out. 'Would you mind offaly' said Mother in her most piercingly polite voice, 'not parkin' here ...' [explaining the doctor's need for quick access to his car].

'Lady', said the man in the car, equably. 'Why don't you go back where ya came from?'

She flinched as if she had been hit in the face. 'Lookit', she said. 'I was living in London a long time before *you* fellas came near the place'. (p. 53)

This anecdote illustrates the second-generation son's awareness of his Irish mother's class and ethnic pretensions, signified by accent and demeanour, which could easily be punctured to reveal her insecurities. It references continuing negotiation between insiders and outsiders which has both spatial and temporal dimensions.

It is not surprising therefore that mixed race partnerships are more common amongst the Irish than the British (Walter, 1988: 22). The *Irish 2 Project* interview sample included two young people each of whom had one Asian and one Irish parent. Tariq had an Irish mother who converted to Islam when she married his Pakistani father. He explained his experience of living in London.

Interviewer: What kind of neighbourhood do you recall growing up in as a child, what was the ethnic mix?

Tariq: I grew up in Balham, South West London where my parents still live. It was very mixed, there were families from Caribbean, South Asia, Irish families as well, I remember it being very mixed, comfortable in the sense it was at ease. I also went to a school in South London that attracted people from a number of different backgrounds. My whole upbringing as far as where I grew up and went to school, where I spent most of my time, was what we call today multicultural I guess, that is what I got used to. If I don't have that around me that is what I look for.

Interviewer: So that is what you are comfortable with, a cosmopolitan multicultural area.

Tariq: Yes, it reflects what I am, who I am, mixed background myself, a religion that is different to most people that I grew up with, living in London. I am not sure whether London, just being in London had as much influence over what I wanted from life, and what I found comfortable in life, whether that had as much influence over me as my parents' background. I think it is a very special place in that sense, London.

Tariq realised that he had taken London's diversity for granted and not understood the significance of location when he applied to university.

Tariq: After all that I said about needing that diversity around me, I just picked Exeter because of the course. I had no idea where I was going to, or what I was letting myself in for. You could count the number of non-white people on both hands walking through campus each day.

Interviewer: Which is quite a tough thing.

Tariq: It was very difficult, I didn't realise it at the time how much that place was not for me. I was eighteen.

Tariq was far more connected with his father's generous and inclusive Pakistani family than his mother's less welcoming Irish one, and therefore identified more with second category in his self-description as 'Irish Pakistani'. But the other mixed race participant, Yasmeen, experienced great difficulty in locating her identity between the two backgrounds. In contrast to Tariq's safe, middle-class upbringing her working-class childhood had been very unhappy with a violent Pakistani father and abusive Irish uncles. In her 30s she had decided that she was simply 'Irish and Pakistani, mixed race'. Both Tariq and Yasmeen fitted the typical pattern of Irish mothers and Asian or Caribbean fathers which are echoed in other case studies mixed race children in London (Twine, 2004; Ifegwunigwe 1999; Harman 2010).

The distinctive experience of being second-generation Irish in London drew heavily on, and contributed to, notions of multi-cultural identities in the city. As the Kilburn case study showed, the Irish were well-placed to offer a more inclusive attitude to later arrivals than people who simply saw themselves as the ethnic majority whose entitlements were under threat. But as the Census debate about ethnic inclusion exemplified, this also placed them in a 'double bind'. Whilst they were often able and willing to 'make their cultures inclusive and accessible in order to contribute towards a liberal-pluralist celebration of 'cosmopolitan' diversity and cross-cultural citizenship', they needed to establish significant differences in order to claim much-needed resources (Nagle, 2009: 5).

An event which epitomises the place of the wider Irish community in London is the St Patrick's Day Festival, one of eight cultural events organised and funded by the Greater London Authority. The others were the Feast of St George, Vaisakhi Festival, Eid, Diwali Festival, African Festival, Liberty Festival and New Year's Eve Fireworks. The revival of the Irish Festival and parade in 2002 after thirty years of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles' signified the recognition of a newly-acceptable population. Initially confined to a site on the south bank of the Thames, after 2005 it moved to Trafalgar Square, described as a symbolic arrival in 'the heart and hegemonic centre of Britain that from which the marginalised Irish had previously been proscribed' (Nagle, 2008: 191).

St Patrick's Day both proclaims the specificity of Irish culture and includes many 'honorary Irish' who are invited to join in. In 2006 President Mary McAleese linked these groups into the notion of a 'global family'

I wish to send warm greetings on this St Patrick's Day to Irish people at home and abroad, and to Ireland's friends around the globe.

Today is a day of celebration in Ireland and for all our global family throughout the world.

Rather than seeing it as part of the 'double bind', Mary Hickman offers a more positive interpretation. She suggests that 'a policy that aims at achieving cohesion by celebrating unity and difference, rather than dissolving difference, is one for our hybridised times' (Hickman, 2014: 126).

### **Multi-Generational Identities of Irish Descent: East End of London**

There is no doubt that the long history of Irish settlement in London is deeply embedded in the ancestry of the population as a whole. The present-day second-generation Irish population is scattered throughout London but the largest numbers identifying as White Irish in the census are now located in the inner west boroughs close to where their migrant parents live. However, this spatial concentration dates only from the 1950s (Weindling and Colloms, 2002: 128). Between the mid-19th century and the Second World War, the largest Irish settlement was in the East End. This is therefore a particularly interesting area in which to explore more distant Irish backgrounds. Although many will have moved away, especially in the 'slum clearance' programmes of the early postwar period, the spread of Irish grandparents and great-grandparents through mixed marriages over several generations makes it likely that a significant proportion of the 'white working class' in the East End has Irish antecedents. Indeed Dench et al.'s controversial monograph *The New East End* (2007: 15) noted that 'to this day a large proportion of the white people in Bethnal Green have Irish surnames'.

For several centuries the East End has been a 'reception area' for immigrants seeking manual labouring jobs and cheap rented housing in the capital. In the 19th century Irish men dominated dock work, for example, and lived close to the river in areas like Wapping and Shadwell. Many Irish women were employed as domestic servants and thus had a wider distribution within London, working for poorer families, including Jewish households, in the East End itself, but also for wealthier families in the West End. By the middle of the century the Irish population in the East End already included several generations. Lynn Lees (1979: 153) shows that by 1851 30 per cent of her sample of five different areas of London was second- or third-generation Irish, increasing to 40 per cent in 1861. She demonstrated that clustering was associated with high levels of

intermarriage between different generations so that apparently English-born partners were usually of Irish descent.

The London Irish generally married within their own ethnic group; there was little intermarriage with people of English ancestry or with continental Roman Catholics. While 24 per cent of the sampled families listed in the 1851 census and 20 per cent of those in the 1861 census contained one English-born and one Irish-born partner, virtually all of the technically English spouses were second- or third-generation Irish. The 'English' men had Irish names and had been born in London; marriage registers from the Catholic churches serving my sample parishes show that most of the maiden names of women marrying Irish-born men were also Irish. First- and second-generation Irish would seem therefore to have intermarried freely.

Out-marriage increased in the early years of the 20th century, for example linking with members of the Jewish community, despite apparently strong religious differences. But the Irish continued as a distinctive presence, often one side of a mixed family tree. Awareness of Irish ancestry remained strong and difference was reinforced by Catholic religious adherence, bringing children from similar backgrounds together in schools. The persistence of Catholic rituals in the public sphere, and their incorporation into local tradition, is recorded by Gilda O'Neill in her collection of local memories entitled *Our East End: Memories of Life in Cockney London*. One interviewee commented on children's games involving building 'grottoes'.

When you'd made your grotto – it could have anything on it from old postcards to a bunch of weeds in a jam jar, anything a bit attractive – you'd shield it, with your arm round it, so no one got a free look. I'm not sure why they were called grottoes, but the idea probably came from the shrines that the mums from Catholic families used to set up by their street doorstep when it was the day of the local Catholic church's parade. (1999: 102)

The support of Irish workers for Jewish residents targeted by fascists in the 1930s is often noted. In the so-called 'Battle of Cable Street' in 1936, when demonstrators succeeded in halting Oswald Mosley's march despite its police support, many observers commented on the strong Irish Catholic presence. Bill Fishman noted

I heard this loudspeaker say "They are going to Cable Street". Suddenly a barricade was erected there and they put an old lorry in the middle of the road and old mattresses. The people up the top of the flats, mainly Irish Catholic women, were throwing rubbish on the police. We were all side by side. I was moved to tears to see bearded Jews and Irish Catholic dockers standing up to stop Mosley. (Fishman: undated)

A sharp change took place after the Second World War. Within the space of twenty years recognition of an Irish presence in the East End had faded. The white working classes had become implicitly 'English' and indeed no mention of Irish backgrounds was made in the influential sociological study *Family and Kinship in East London* published in 1963 although it emphasised neighbourhood stability (Walter, 2014). A number of reasons could explain this loss. It was part of a consolidation of 'whiteness' as a symbol of a wider national identity embedded in the welfare state, as well as differentiation from new 'black' immigrant arrivals from the Caribbean and South Asia. It could also have been an unacknowledged element in the desire to hide the ascribed inferiority of 'slum' dwelling. O'Neill commented on attitudes associated with moves to the suburbs in the 1950s:

The cockney identity, which was once carefully hidden by those who considered themselves fortunate to leave the slums of their childhood, but is now more often acknowledged as a source of great pride. Where once people would have been wary of discussing their working class roots, with mothers telling their children to *talk proper* and to ape the ways of their *bettors*, they are now more likely to celebrate such memorable beginnings. (1999: xiii)

The continued salience of fourth-, fifth- and sixth-generation Irish backgrounds is retained in individual memories and claimed identities. For example, in researching the descendants of the matchwomen who participated in the Bryant and May factory strike of 1888, Louise Raw located and interviewed three grandchildren, each of whom retained memories of stories they had been told when young (Raw, 2011: 208). One was the descendant of striker Mary Driscoll, herself a second-generation woman who had two Irish-born parents. Mary's daughter was described by her own daughter, Joan, as feeling herself to be Irish. Joan, Mary's granddaughter – the fourth generation – said that she herself 'inherited this identity'. Another fourth-generation Irish resident, Ted Johns, was interviewed in 1994 and explained his inherited family political allegiances. He was described as 'leading the fight against Fascism' in the Isle of Dogs (*Irish Post*, 1994):

Ted knows little about his great-grandfather, who emigrated to England as a coal trimmer. His grandfather, Tom Murphy, was greeted on moving into Limehouse in London's East End with a hail of bricks. 'They put his windows in because locals assumed the Irish would be competing for their jobs but the fact that Tom was active in trades unions overcame that.'

Traces of earlier Irish immigration remain in family memories and in a number of public spheres, including political participation in the Labour Party. They also underlie the significant number of Catholic schools in the East End even though these are now predominantly attended by recent arrivals from other global origins.

## Conclusion

The Irish in London are part of the ever-changing mosaic of migrant settlement. There are important continuities, including the association with low-paid work for people leaving Ireland at young ages with few qualifications. However the recent large-scale immigration from Eastern Europe has seriously challenged traditional 'Irish' roles such as work 'on the buildings' (Cowley, 2011). Although the White Irish still had the highest proportion in the lowest socio-economic category 'Routine occupations' (11.4 per cent) in 2011 this was not far above White Other (9.2 per cent), which mainly comprises newer arrivals from Eastern Europe (Ryan et al., 2014: 20). At the same time the presence of these White Others strengthens the claim that 'whiteness' does not preclude ethnic difference.

Unlike many recent arrivals the Irish are deeply embedded in London's population over many generations. They have traditionally settled in areas with other incomers seeking 'unskilled' employment and cheap rented accommodation. This was exemplified in the East End in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and more recently in Brent, the most ethnically mixed borough in London, which also had the highest Irish-born proportion in 2011. The positive contribution of this long-term settled migrant identity to neighbourhood social cohesion was observed in Kilburn and is also evident in the East End, as a critic of *The New East End* points out:

Whilst there have been serious conflicts between groups within the area, historically the diverse populations have been able to mobilize across internal divisions and oppose fascists in the 1930s, property developers in the 1980s and 1990s and the racism of both the Liberal democrats who controlled Tower Hamlets from 1986 to 1994 and the British National Party (BNP). Even with a superficial and outsider's knowledge of the complexity of Tower Hamlets it is obvious that a simple division into black and white (or Bangladeshi and white) will not do, nor will ungrounded reports of white resentment (Moore, 2008: 351)

Despite such longevity and substantial size the Irish community remains a hidden population, often omitted from academic and policy discussions about migration. This reflects an ongoing ambivalence about the place of the Irish in Britain, embedded in the long history of national political conflict. On the one hand Ireland was part of the United Kingdom until 1922 and retains a 'special relationship', for example in respect of welfare and voting rights on arrival. On the other, memories remain of very recent hostilities involving violent action in London with damaging consequences for the treatment of all Irish people, of which residues remain.

Whilst historians and social scientists can chart key aspects of these processes, perhaps the complexities are captured most closely in the rich London Irish literature of novels, short stories and auto/biographical texts (Murray, 2012; McWilliams, 2013).

By reading them, we become more aware of the ways in which identities are narrativized between home and away, between the personal and the collective and between facts and fictions. As a consequence, we are better able to appreciate the dynamic interdependence between narrative, diaspora and identity, and how and why migrants and their communities proclaim or disavow various forms of cultural allegiance. (Murray, 2012: 190–91)

Printed ‘voices’ thus reveal experiences of being Irish in London over generations, which are otherwise invisible. Songs and music offer yet another route into expressions of migrant and diaspora identities. In his chapter ‘The Importance of Being (London) Irish: Hybridity, Essentialism and The Pogues’, Sean Campbell describes The Pogues’ ‘innovative impulse, which had staged a second-generation Irish speaking position and installed a London-Irish imaginary’ (2011:101).

Language is thus a particularly important signifier of Irishness both in written and spoken forms. The apparent ‘sameness’ of the native language of Irish migrants and ‘indigenous’ Londoners, masks ways in which it simultaneously denotes difference. Just as second-generation Irish musicians are often labelled English, so the canon of ‘English’ literature claims Irish writers, as in the case of the poet Seamus Heaney. At the same time Irish ‘accents’ are key indicators of ethnic otherness, apparently dividing migrants from descendants. ‘London Irish’ may be seen as a more inclusive identity which acknowledges the multi-cultural reality of the capital city.

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