

Transnational networks across generations: childhood visits to Ireland by the second generation in England

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Introduction

The close entanglements of families spread between Ireland and England are often ignored as transnational links, reflecting the hazy understanding of separate states within the 'British Isles' especially outside the Irish Republic. But the significance of these ties was demonstrated by the size of return migration of Irish nationals with their British-born children in the Celtic Tiger phase of economic growth of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. About half of the immigration 'explosion' was accounted for by first- and second-generation 'returning' migrants who constituted 8.8 per cent of the total population in 2006 (Ní Laoire, 2008). These recorded moves represent a visible outcome of a myriad of hidden exchanges which connect families between the two islands. Indeed long summer holiday 'home' visits to Ireland in childhood are an iconic feature of second-generation *British* Irish experiences, in contrast to more widely recognized Irish-American identities.

This chapter examines both the public record available in recent autobiographical memoirs and novels, and private accounts produced in discussion groups and interviews generated by the ESRC-funded *Irish 2 Project* to uncover the complex family networks which structure migration flows between Ireland and England.¹ The geographical specificity within the broader location of Britain selected here reflects distinctive patterns of migration as well as national and religious alignments which contrast with Scotland, for example. A particular historical focus is also given to visits made in the childhoods of adults now in their middle age, whose parents were part of the post-war outpouring of migrants from the 'rural backwater' of Ireland to provide labour for economically booming, and labour-poor, England (Hickman *et al.*, 2001). Such a perspective responds to Steven Vertovec's critique of 'the current shift to a transnational approach towards migration processes and migrant communities' when he observes: 'it is often unclear or undemonstrated just "how new" transnational networks are among migrants'. An historical perspective is often largely lost (Vertovec, 2001: 576). Inevitably such an approach relies on adult memories rather than the direct contemporary accounts of children themselves (Ní Laoire, 2011).

A striking feature of childhood visits is the mismatch between the rich and often treasured memories of the participants and their families, and their absence from English imaginations. Typically the visits arose out of, and reinforced, the distinctive 'stem family' system whereby one branch of the Irish farm family remained on the ancestral land while most siblings emigrated to establish new family units in other parts of the diaspora (Arensberg and Kimball, 1968). The larger extended family reunited for particular occasions – Christmas, weddings, funerals and for a longer period in the school summer holidays. Such family traditions and behaviour were far removed from

English urban industrial society, where families were smaller, had few significant intergenerational or lateral extensions and lacked the domestic space for large gatherings. As a result the summer outflow of children from Irish neighbourhoods in English cities had no parallel in English people's experience and was barely noticed as an activity among Irish neighbours. For their part Irish families contributed to this domestic privacy by 'keeping their heads down' about their summer plans. In the 1950s and 1960s there was a stigma attached to visits to Ireland, which did not compare in prestige to a holiday in Spain. Moreover, in the 1970s and 1980s the application of the Prevention of Terrorism Act was a strong deterrent to visiting Ireland, as it could lead to lengthy questioning at ports and airports, creating anxiety, missed travel connections and costly re-booking (Hickman and Walter, 1997: 201–3; Hillyard, 1993).

Within the Irish community in Britain, however, family visits had important consequences at a number of levels. For individuals they reinforced a sense of ethnic and national identity which may have been discouraged in Britain by parents fearful of social and political stereotyping. For families they inserted new generations into strong social networks of grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. They also added valuable economic resources at a time of high expenditure on young children. At a wider community level they introduced children to a knowledge of Irish history which was absent in their education in Britain (Walter *et al.*, 2002). Children heard first-hand stories about Irish independence and often gained an alternative view of the political relationship between Ireland and Britain which strengthened their ability to resist discrimination.

Autobiographic narratives of childhood visits

Memories of family visits to Ireland are recorded publicly in both autobiographical and fictional accounts by Irish authors. These include vividly remembered episodes replete with details about the contrasting landscapes and standards of living, different patterns of social behaviour and replacement within extended families. Autobiographical memoirs and novels describe them either as golden times of family wholeness (Casey, 1987; McCarthy, 2000; Walsh, 1999) or as missing events which urgently need to be compensated for or explained in adult life (Morrison, 2003). In all cases these stories mirror the diasporic condition of split families and selves, and individual attempts to resolve dilemmas of identification and belonging.

Childhood visits to Ireland are also a key part of the private experiences of many second-generation Irish people. This chapter uses life story data from second-generation Irish women and men living in England, to explore ways in which childhood memories have contributed to constructions of identity at different stages of their lives. It explores people's memories of their visits and understandings of their meanings in relation to life in England and investigates processes by which group discussions prompt elaboration of accounts and re-evaluation of common experiences. Links are made to second-generation Irish people's contemporary senses of Irish, English and other identities as they are expressed both in groups and individually.

Key dimensions of difference are highlighted here, taking account of a range of intersecting ways in which people born in England to one or two Irish-born parents are positioned. These include gender, social class, age, religion, rural/urban 'home' places in Ireland, locations of origin in the North and South and hybrid ethnic backgrounds both within the British Isles and with another parental origin in mainland Europe or territories of the former

British Empire. Three categories of childhood experience are explored in more depth, including first, the iconic long summer visit to the west of Ireland where the contrast between urban industrial life in Britain and the rural 'idyll' of the west of Ireland was most extreme. Secondly, a small group with mixed racial heritage was received into families and neighbourhoods in different parts of Ireland where whiteness was the norm and 'strangers' from other parts of the world were then almost unknown. Thirdly, the situation faced by children being introduced to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, which were at their height during the 1970s and 1980s at the peak of numbers of second-generation children in Britain, is examined.

Iconic visits to the West of Ireland

The largest number of emigrants to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s came from rural Ireland, especially the counties of the western seaboard where farms were smallest and economic life most vulnerable (Mac Laughlin, 1997: 17). Typically families were large with many siblings, most of whom emigrated especially to urban England when visas to the USA became difficult to get. But parents remained on the home farm and a few children stayed, to provide labour for their ageing parents or to marry into neighbouring farms. A 'skeleton' family thus continued to occupy the land which had been farmed by a particular family for several generations. This provided a base to which emigrant branches of the family could return when time and finances allowed. They were usually welcomed back as sources of social and economic support. Hugh Brody (1973) describes the positive response to summer visitors in areas which had experienced heavy depopulation. Local people who felt depressed and isolated in winter months were given a morale boost by visitors' decision to spend time with them and value their way of life and the beauty of their surroundings. Family members would 'settle back' into their roles in the household, women helping their mothers and sisters with domestic work and men joining in the labour of harvesting and turfcutting. The return was an extension of the behaviour of urban migrants within Ireland, who returned to help with the harvest and brought their children (Moving here).

A third of the participants in the *Irish 2 Project* (30 out of 87) had at least one parent born in the west of Ireland.² They described the different roles of emigrant family members.

Interviewer: Did your dad come with you on these holidays?

Nicholas:³ He would come over for a couple of weeks. He'd have two weeks off from work, whereas we'd go for the whole of the summer holidays. Clearly my mum was expected to work while she was there, she'd be helping out in the shop, doing this and that, it wasn't really a holiday in the sense of sitting in a deck chair enjoying the sunshine, for her at least. We were pretty well allowed to roam at will as young kids. Dad would come over for two weeks and it would be a big event going up to the junction to meet him off the train.

Children would also be expected to take their share of farm chores.

Brian: We were brought up in a city [Birmingham] and the only thing we had was the local park, but this was the whole countryside for the month or six weeks. Everything else that went in with it, we did the harvesting, collecting the water from the well, the animals on the farm, it was all good fun.

Summer visits were thus not simply holidays. They were part of an extended family economy which benefited both stayers and movers. Children travelled to Ireland with one or more parents or on their own. Parents who accompanied children did not always remain for the whole period. Fathers, especially, came for a short period and then returned to work in England. James, who

grew up in London, emphasized the practicality of the arrangement. His father organized the transport, which was required because of the inaccessibility of the destination and the need to ensure the safe arrival of young children.

He'd get very little time off, so he would take us over, and then come straight back, he might stay for a weekend, or link it in if there was a horse race or hurling match going on, we were never invited. Then he would come over and pick us up. It sounds almost like an immersion, let's take these children and immerse them in their own culture. I don't think it was, it was like Sunday school and Saturday morning pictures. They were just glad to get us off their hands, convenient, child care basically. It wasn't for Irish culture, as you wouldn't find it there anyway, certainly not the popular conception of Irish culture. There was no traditional Irish music, if you heard anything you would hear country and western.

Mothers were more likely to stay longer, often because they had part-time work which coincided with school holidays, for example employment as school 'dinner ladies'.

This exchange of supervision from parental care in an urban environment to a looser surveillance within a rural community added to the sense of freedom which many interviewees in the *Irish 2 Project* reported.

James: Looking back on it now, it was the freedom, you went out in the morning and didn't get back until 10 o'clock at night. You would eat at whichever house you happened to be at, it was always an aunt or uncle anyway. You had cousins galore that were roughly the same age, so we were going out all over the place, just wandering up and down the streets. There was virtually no traffic, we'd hang around outside the pubs, to see if you could see an uncle who was yours, and he might buy you a packet of crisps, trying to see what was going on inside. Tremendous freedom.

Bernadette, who was born and brought up in London, echoed this narrative of freedom. But she also nuanced the 'rosy' picture with more adult reflections about the positioning of English-born children within the rural society they were entering.

Interviewer: What were your impressions of Ireland as a child?

Bernadette: I loved it. If you think we were in town, so that was totally different, I am sure in the country in England I would have felt the same. In Ireland everybody knows who you are, you were Frank Kavanagh's wee one, you were known, people would talk to you and knew who you were. Everyone was very friendly, but as I got older I realized they weren't just friendly it was a bit nosey, but that is country folk for you.

Interviewer: Small town life.

Bernadette: Absolutely, but having said that as a youngster I loved it, I would climb mountains, go off with my cousins, there was so much freedom. We had a good amount of freedom, but strangely enough we seemed the naive ones when we were there, we really did. As city kids we were naive, so obviously there was a bit of leg pulling, but you learn from it. Apart from that I loved it.

The theme of freedom is echoed in other accounts of second-generation childhood visits. King *et al.* (2009) present this very strongly in their analysis of childhood visits by second-generation Greeks and Cypriots to the parental homeland when they observe, 'one word stood out as completely predominant in the narratives of all these summer visits – freedom'. Moreover, like the iconic west of Ireland stories, they found this picture to be 'remarkably consistent' (King *et al.*, 2009: 6). Peggy Levitt (2009: 1234) also remarks on the 'glowing terms' in which Gujarati second-generation Americans remembered their annual trips 'home'.

Even though the primary consideration may have been economic, the consequences were social and cultural. The length of the stay meant that children established close relationships with their relatives and absorbed everyday aspects of culture which fitted with the domestic world of their nuclear family in England, if not necessarily with the wider society of school and neighbourhood.

Nicholas: It was an integral part of your identity, we didn't talk about it as a holiday, in fact when I was in my teens and other kids at school would ask, 'Where did you go on holiday?' I'd say 'To Ireland.' They'd say 'Didn't you go abroad?' and I'd say 'Ireland is abroad', and get into that debate, but actually it was just something we did. Every summer we'd get bundled off to Paddington station and on to the train, we'd be over there for summer holidays all of us. My mum would go home to see her mum and dad, my father would come over for a couple of weeks when he got off work, but essentially we were there for the summer.

Issues of cultural difference and political conflict were raised, but family identities overrode ethnic and national assignments, especially for younger children. As Dermot, whose family lived in County Clare pointed out, English accents were commented on by strangers rather than family members.

Interviewer: How do you think you were seen as a child in Ireland, were you seen as English or Irish or as so and so's son?

Dermot: When I was much younger, I didn't really think about that I suppose. I think I was seen in different ways by different people, I think very much seen as the son of my father for one thing. I think some people it was probably more those that we didn't know, if we met them out and about, and they might say 'Are you from England?' or 'Are you English?' but not really a big issue at that time. I think perhaps as a teenager, that came into it a little bit more, you pick up on more comments about that, you are more aware.

More than 70 per cent of second-generation Irish people in England have a non-Irish, usually English, parent. This was not necessarily a barrier to good relationships, although this could be the case, as writer Blake Morrison's (2003) harrowing tale of his mother's deliberately hidden Irish identity illustrates. But Nicholas's father fitted in well:

He loved it actually, may be because he was always on holiday when he was there, but he could get on quite well at a level with the Irish way of life. Of course as the father of the family, he'd have a certain degree of status anyway, people were going to smooth his path, no-one would slag him off because he was English. He was quite a calm man, and happy sitting out watching birds or enjoying the country life. He liked the horses, a Guinness or two, and liked getting on with people. He was quite calm and happy in that way, so it was never an issue.

Although the balance of reports was strongly positive, not everyone had such happy memories. For some the level of poverty they encountered was shocking and others found family demands suffocating. Kieran, whose father was from County Limerick and mother from County Cork, said:

It was about living in a rural area, very backward, there were not things like inside loos, very strange in that sense to come to terms with that. So you have this idea of a very backward community, also the fact that time didn't seem to matter a great deal. You would be talking to somebody, a car would go down, and the other two people who were there, would have a discussion about who it was, where it was going, and why. Then the other thing was the whole ritual about going around to relatives. I can remember being violently sick, the reason being I had so much rich food, everywhere we went they all got the best food out. It was just too much in the end. It wasn't a holiday, and I think that's what

my mum and dad felt. If you work the rest of the year, you only have two weeks off then you just want to relax.

Nevertheless childhood holidays in Ireland was the topic discussed at greatest length by focus group members, usually strangers brought together for the first time. They exchanged anecdotes animatedly and welcomed the unusual experience of finding people in England outside their families with whom to have such conversations (Walter *et al.*, 2002: 213).

Mixed heritage

Second-generation Irish people with 'mixed race' heritages have very different childhood memories of visiting Ireland. Four such people were interviewed for the *Irish 2 Project*, and although each had a distinctive set of parental backgrounds, there were elements of conflict in each case such that none had kept up the family contacts in adulthood although each subsequently visited Ireland by choice.

Two interviewees had Irish mothers and Asian fathers, but their class positions were quite different. Tariq's mother came from a middle-class family in County Cork. She had married an Indian man in London, chosen to convert to Islam and taken a Muslim name. The new family went back to stay with grandparents every summer. Tariq's glowing account was very similar to that of the white second-generation participants:

It was great, it was wonderful I don't know if you know [town in County Cork], then it was a small little town, it has changed immensely, and my grandmother's home was in a place called – , it was beautiful countryside, a river running behind the house. I was 10–11 and started going when I was much younger. For me it was a great time, get out of London, beautiful countryside, the weather was good if you were lucky, and surrounded by family. It was quite a big family then, it was my grandmother, my uncle who is still there, and another brother of my mother's who has since passed away. There were cousins and friends, so it was a wonderful time, how Irish it was for me at that age, it was just visiting relatives. I was told not to walk too near the pigs by my father.

Tariq mentioned that in the 1970s, when rural Ireland had no experience of 'black' immigration, his father was received in a positive way:

Interviewer: What you were saying is in the past people were curious, friendly curious?

Tariq: Yes, that is all it was, my father had no problem with it. I think we were quite happy there. I was very happy there I think, as far as I know my parents were happy there together. There was some rift between my mother and her family after she married, because of whom she married, but I think which is often the case, after the grandchildren come along, and they realize that you are serious and your partner is serious, it brings most people around.

However, the visits stopped when his grandmother died and Tariq was ambivalent about his plans for future visits:

I guess I am not eager to go back. I have no burning desire to go back, why that is I am not sure. Ireland for me has been a place where my mother is from, and my mother hasn't been back often in the recent past. I think the only reason why I'd go back to Ireland is if I was going with friends, or if I had the opportunity to see the country and travel. I have heard it is a stunningly beautiful country with much to do and see. So whether I would go back to [Cork] or whether I would go back to Ireland, are two slightly different questions.

Yasmeen told a very different story. Her Irish Protestant mother from

County Meath in the Midlands had married a Pakistani man in London. He never accompanied his wife and children, which they welcomed as a respite from his violence.

We would go to Ireland for every holiday, so that was nice, the Irish influence was there from my grandfather, all my aunts and uncles, that was OK. We were pretty free then my dad wasn't there, there were no beatings.

However, they were subjected to sexual abuse from their mother's brothers who lived isolated lives as Protestants on a remote farm with no co-religionists in the neighbourhood.

Interviewer: What were your impressions of Ireland as a child? You went every summer with your mum and you saw your two grandparents.

Yasmeen: On one hand it was really good, the farming, working the cows with my grandfather, totally free to run around like lunatics, but then there was a price to pay as there was a lot of child abuse as well at the same time, in my mother's family. All the uncles the brothers, wherever you went it was there, I thought it was normal until I left home. During the day the day was nice it was free, you would dig up the potatoes the carrots and everything else, the boiled bacon, all together around the table, that was nice.

Like Tariq, the issue of food taboos was raised by the centrality of bacon in the Irish diet.

Interviewer: You'd have bacon when you went back to Ireland?

Yasmeen: Yes but my father was never there.

Interviewer: Was he ever told about it?

Yasmeen: No he'd have killed us all, but it was boiled bacon every day, I am an avid fan of bacon we have it every day I love it, not so keen on pork.

Yasmeen's holiday experiences were as strong and vivid as the idyllic pictures painted by the respondents such as James, Nicholas and Dermot who holidayed in the west of Ireland. They stood out starkly against the horrors of sexual abuse by her uncles and the imprisonment her father inflicted on the children in London.

Although night times were horrific, day times were fantastic. It was wonderful in the day time, it was lovely walking across the bogs, I have good memories of the day time. Coming back to London it was a nightmare, it was back to our house, nobody was allowed in and we weren't free, we could go into the garden or the bedroom, but we couldn't go out anywhere. It was like going back into a chicken cage.

There are parallels here with Ruth Hopkins' (2007) account of her father's discovery that the 'fairyland' country of his childhood memories was simultaneously the site of great brutality towards women pregnant outside of marriage and children abandoned by their families.

It is not my image of Ireland. What I recall is a mixture of pleasure, lovely memories, but meeting these women and to learn a bit more of the Magdalene asylums and industrial schools was really shocking. (Hopkins, 2007)

Like Tariq, Yasmeen felt drawn to other parts of Ireland but

I don't ever go anywhere that I went as a child. I have been to Cork quite a few times. I went for the night clubs which are fantastic, and to have a walk around. It has mainly been weekends away, little fishing villages. I was going to Donegal, went to Sligo, that was too close for comfort, been to Dublin, went to Cork, that was lovely.

By contrast two other interviewees had very little or no contact with the Irish side of their mixed heritage. Rick, who lived in Manchester, had never met his Nigerian father who left his unmarried mother before he was born. His mother took him once to Dublin as a child of ten, but his recollection was very hazy and he did not meet other people.

I don't know whether she rented it, there are vague impressions of a bungalow somewhere near the Liffey not far off there.

He too had returned as an adult:

Then I went as a young man on a twenty-four-hour boozier trip. I did that a couple of times, and a couple of years ago did the grown-up family man bit, and stayed at [friend]'s place. I did the mature man's view of Ireland.

Gail was born in Birmingham to an Irish mother and West Indian father, to whom she was not close. Although she was brought up in a strongly Irish family whose roots were in Wexford, there was no close family left there and her mother did not visit any relatives. Gail had visited Dublin simply as a popular tourist destination, but was surprised by her own reaction.

I went to Dublin very much in the same way that I went to Paris, Copenhagen and Milan. It was a nice place for the weekend. When I got there I experienced a nostalgia for Ireland that I didn't expect to happen, my family aren't from Dublin, so I didn't consider I was going home in any sense of the word. But when I got there, this was great, it was soothing, and great, it was to do with Irish people, not Irish soil. It was the high concentration of Irish accents, food, culture, I could get that going to Sparkhill [Birmingham]. It was the people, not the soil.

She felt no wish to go to Wexford and was aware that her reception might reveal unwelcome racism.

I'd like to go for a holiday, but I don't feel the need to go and touch the place I was from, and all of that, it doesn't do anything for me. Especially I have no relatives there that I know, and they would probably be horrified to know they had black people in the family. I don't have any need to do it.

Changes in the ethnic composition of Ireland as a consequence of immigration from other parts of the world mean that black people are no longer the rarity of the respondents' childhoods in the 1970s and 1980s. However, there is evidence that racist attitudes have increased in some contexts so that mixed-race second-generation people from England would continue to feel unwelcome (Garner, 2004; Lentin and McVeigh, 2006).

Visits to Northern Ireland

Many people with Irish parentage have family connections to Northern Ireland. Although the levels of emigration from the North have not matched the extreme peaks experienced in the Republic in particular periods, such as the 1950s and later the 1980s, they have been at high levels (Walter, 2008). Of the second-generation Irish in England, a considerable proportion have at least one parent born in the North, including a quarter (nineteen) of the *Irish 2 Project* interviewees. High levels of intermarriage between people from the North and the Republic reflect shared cultural backgrounds which are brought together outside the island of Ireland. The major factor for children visiting extended families in Northern Ireland in the 1960–1990s was firsthand exposure to political violence. Fear for their children's safety was an important reason for many parents to reduce these visits. Where there were different parental places of origin, safer places in the Republic were chosen over riskier destinations in the North. There were a number of consequences

for children and their families. Children were informed about the causes of the Troubles in ways that were not available to them in England. Face-to-face associations with families in Northern Ireland also exposed Catholic children to suspicion of involvement in IRA activity.

Identification as English was potentially more dangerous in Northern Ireland. Linda, who was born and had lived all her life in Banbury, had Protestant parents from Ballymena and visited the family only once, when she was eleven. Like Kieran, she described the experience of meeting the family and their neighbours in very negative terms.

We stayed with my mum's mum, my gran. Her mum lived to be ninety something, quite old on that side, then we got dragged round to Uncle Jack, Uncle Stanley, things like that.

Linda gave a graphic description of the hostility she experienced, which continued to influence her feelings about visiting her relatives:

I am quite intrigued, but the trouble keeps me from wanting to go to Northern Ireland. We didn't have a nice visit when we were there. Although we were staying with my gran, the kids treated us as outcasts, and we were stoned on the way round to the shops. I wouldn't want to take my kids.

The issue of their English accents, often remarked on by second-generation children visiting all parts of Ireland, was accentuated for those going to the North. Rachel, whose parents were from County Tyrone, was asked:

Interviewer: What did you make of these visits?

Rachel: We were very aware of how we spoke, that was a big thing, it was like I don't want to open my mouth. That is all I can remember 'Oh God I can't talk, I sound so English', but I can't really remember. My biggest memory was my accent.

Interviewer: Did you try to modify it or not speak too much?

Rachel: Not speak too much unless we were together. We were such a close family we could appear to be quite rude really when we were together at functions. When my brother got married, we don't feel the need to speak to others and include people, we have always had each other. It is awful, but we don't need to try to make friends. Probably we half got away with it by sticking together and talking amongst ourselves.

Mairead, who was raised in Manchester, with a Catholic mother from Lisburn, also had frightening memories of threatening behaviour and bombings.

For me it was completely different to what my friends were experiencing. We'd go for the summer months as mum and dad were off as they were teachers. I remember being there for the twelfth of July,⁴ and not knowing what was happening the first time. This was when nan and grandad were in Lisburn which is predominantly Protestant. I remember lying upstairs in bed, the bar was closed obviously, but there was mesh on the windows. The bar was a couple of doors down from the church. The Orangemen would walk down and stop outside the church and play. They'd march a bit further down and stop outside the bar and play, you'd hear them banging on the gate and stones being thrown. At first I didn't have a clue, I was only young, but then the more you learn about it, the more bitter you become.

Mairead saw this as a duty visit to family, contrasting it with renting a holiday cottage in Donegal.

That was a proper holiday then, because I didn't know anyone and that was like going on holiday, but going to Lisburn, you were getting away from England,

but it wasn't classed as a holiday. We were just living the way everyone else lives, and had a bit of money and that was it.

These visits exposed children to the realities of their parents' backgrounds. They illustrate the importance attached to keeping in touch even in very risky situations. The children were being introduced to ways of life which were far removed from those they encountered, or even heard about publicly, in England. Censorship meant that everyday life in Northern Ireland was not portrayed in the media, which simply reported bombings and shootings with very little explanation or sympathy for those caught up in violent incidents. Such politicization of children was graphically underlined in Patrick Maguire's memoir *My Father's Watch*, written with the help of novelist Carlo Gébler and subsequently given global coverage in the 2009 film with the same title. Patrick was the youngest member of the 'Maguire Seven', who were wrongly convicted of being accessories to the Guildford pub bombings in 1974. The memoir describes the excitement of entering what was effectively a war zone in the 1970s.

In Belfast one thing was very interesting and I was impatient to see it. . .
A line of British soldiers was moving down the street, guns out, the last man walking backwards, guarding the others from attack. Lovely.
Then I saw something even better: a Saracen armoured car. It was big and green and looked so heavy when it roared along in the opposite direction to us.
(Maguire, 2009: 57)

Patrick explained his ignorance of the political background to the conflict.

I didn't know any of this because we didn't talk about it at number forty three Third Avenue [Harrow, West London]. I had no idea, as Uncle Hugh drove us to his house that morning, what Belfast and Northern Ireland were going through or why. I was eleven. I was off school and I was on holiday. I was going to see my uncles, aunts and cousins. That was all I cared about. (Maguire, 2009: 58)

But the family connections drew him into the conflict. His cousins and their friends threw stones and bottles at the Saracens and challenged him to join them.

'How come you don't throw anything?' This was one of my cousins' friends. 'Is it because you're a Brit?'

A more serious consequence was later interrogation by the Special Branch of the police under suspicion of terrorist activity. His Belfast family was assumed to link him directly with the IRA and provide evidence of his involvement in planning bombings in Britain (Maguire, 2009: 334).

Like Mairead, Patrick drew a distinction between these family visits and 'holidays'.

Now we were settled, my parents started saving, and once there was enough we had a holiday, the first we ever took. We went to Margate. (Maguire, 2009: 11)

All these accounts illustrate the intersections of private family memories and public political events for second-generation Irish children. Their English 'homes' placed them in a distinctive and potentially dangerous position when their accents were heard on the streets. Assumptions were made about their identities and allegiances which paralleled those their parents experienced in England at times of IRA bombing campaigns.

Conclusions

Childhood visits to Ireland were remembered very vividly. For most second-generation people who had made such visits they were a positive experience which was linked with idealized memories of childhood – long sunny days, loving acceptance by close-knit families, adult responsibility for the work involved, and above all freedom to roam which contrasted with the urban confinement of life in England. As Joe Moran (2002: 171, 172) argues, childhood nostalgia is not simply related to ‘dominant narratives of class, gender, nation and the family’, although these are important, but is also ‘a sentiment that resonates with our own deepest longings for identity, security and belonging’. In the case of diasporic populations, there is the added factor of a ‘homing desire’ (Brah, 1996) which is transmitted to later generations. Caitriona Ni Laoire (2011: 1258) highlights the extra-national dimension given to ‘innocent Irish childhoods’ drawing on ‘romantic and primordial images of Ireland’.

These positive associations led to ongoing relationships in adulthood. People re-created for their own children, the third generation, the experiences they had enjoyed themselves (King *et al.*, 2009: 23). John O’Farrell (2005), a travel journalist for *The Observer* newspaper, reported that ‘we did not go to Ireland that much when I was a child’. However, he later explains: ‘But since I have had children of my own I have been to the Republic every year. You have to give your children some sense of heritage and I’m buggered if we’re spending three weeks in Maidenhead every August.’ John Walsh also introduced his children to Athenry, County Galway, but with some trepidation:

I needn’t have worried. The minute Sophie, my eldest daughter, met her cousins, Annabel and Giles, she was sold . . . The butcher, John-Joe Brady, greeted the children; ‘Hi Annabel. Hello Giles. And who is this little girl? Don’t tell me let me guess. You’re John’s daughter, is that right? I heard he was in town’. (Walsh, 1999: 244)

For some third-generation children this has even led to a move to live in Ireland. In his interview for the *Irish 2 Project*, Banbury participant Niall explained that his son enjoyed his visits so much that he seriously considered working there:

Mark is an apprentice electrician. He has just started, but he said last week ‘Would you mind if I went over to Ireland to see Uncle Frank and stay with him?’ I said ‘Why?’ He said ‘I want to.’

Such ties help to explain the significant proportion of UK-born migrants into Ireland between 1992 and 2009, about 10 per cent of the total compared with 15 per cent who were Irish-born returners (CSO, 1992–2009). While some were younger children living within families, others were clearly independent adult migrants choosing a way of life they had experienced at first hand. However, the difference between the ‘everyday reality’ of living in Ireland and ‘life on holiday’ might provide a sharp jolt as Greek-Cypriots found (King *et al.*, 2009: 20). Moreover, not all emigrants to England retained strong family ties in Ireland. For a myriad of reasons the links had been broken. These included the high cost of travel for large families whose income was low, the premature death of parents and the emigration of whole families so that there was no ‘homeplace’ to go back to.

The importance of childhood holidays may assume a particularly significant role in defining identities in later life. It can be used by second-generation

Irish people to explain important choices in their lives. For example, Prime Minister Tony Blair used the trope in the opening paragraphs of his historic speech to the Irish Parliament on 26 November 1998 at the time of the Good Friday Agreement. He established his claim to an Irish identity, and thus to a personal investment in – and, by implication, contribution to – the success of the Peace Process by a detailed description of the idyll:

We spent virtually every childhood summer holiday up to when the troubles really took hold in Ireland, usually at Rosstown, the Sands House Hotel, I think it was. And we would travel in the beautiful countryside of Donegal. It was there in the seas off the Irish coast that I learned to swim, there that my father took me to my first pub, a remote little house in the country, for a Guinness, a taste I've never forgotten and which it is always a pleasure to repeat (Blair, 1998).

The impact of childhood summers in Ireland was noted in other career paths. Reviews of Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* commented on this influence on his writing:

Although second generation Irish, McDonagh's childhood summers spent in the 'old country' clearly weren't just long lazy days at the seaside. His feel for the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the Connemara dialect are spot on. (Coyle, 2009)

Kevin Rowland, lead singer of Dexy's Midnight Runners, explained how family visits to Ireland underlined his sense of Irishness and contributed to his musical style (Campbell, 2011). Similarly the national allegiance of Seamus McDonagh, born in Yorkshire of Irish parents, who subsequently played football for Ireland, has been linked with childhood holidays spent there (Holmes and Storey, 2004: 97).

Transnational family networks across generations reinforced in childhood have both personal and public ramifications in many different arenas. What might appear to be a private matter of leisure, social obligation and/or childcare may also have wider implications for national allegiances, political awareness, economic coping strategies and cultural capital in both nations. Far from ignoring boundaries, 'transnationalism draws attention to what it negates – that is, the continued significance of the national' (Pratt and Yeoh, 2003: 161). National differences and interdependencies are highlighted through personal experiences of specific locations. Childhood is a central aspect of the process, both for the migrant parents whose main memories relate to places they knew as children and for the next generation which establishes ties to the same places and people. As Peggy Levitt points out: 'Whether individuals ultimately forge or maintain some kind of transnational connection, at some point in their lives, largely depends on the extent to which they were brought up in transnational spaces' (2009: 1230).

Notes

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2 Counties include Kerry, Limerick, Clare, Galway, Mayo, Sligo and Donegal.

3 Pseudonyms have been given to the participants and others mentioned in their accounts.

4 This is an annual Protestant celebration of the victory of William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Members of the Orange Order and Protestant marching bands stage parades throughout Northern Ireland.

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- TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS ACROSS GENERATIONS **33**
3995 Migrations.qxd:text 2/5/13 09:49 Page 33
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