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**An Examination of Ethnic Identity: A Case Study of 'Second Generation' Irish  
people in Birmingham**

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This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in fulfilment of the requirements  
of admission to the degree of Ph.D in the Centre for Ethnic Relations

February 2002

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## **Acknowledgements**

First of all I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Montserrat Guibernau and Professor Zig Layton Henry for their excellent guidance throughout the time that it has taken to produce this thesis. I would particularly like to thank them for their consistency of advice and diligence in the development, structuring and completion of this project.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of the members of staff and my doctoral contemporaries within the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations (CRER), University of Warwick for their support and invaluable suggestions in relation to the shape of this project. I would specifically like to thank Dr Mark Johnson for his excellent guidance during the initial period of the project and particularly in relation to the question of funding.

I also wish to acknowledge the generous financial support afforded to this project by the European Social Research Council (1997-2000) and Birmingham Training and Enterprise Council for its support through its 'Lifelong Learning Bursary' (1996). Particular thanks goes to Ms Dawn Hill of the ESRC who has been called upon to answer innumerable questions.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the fieldwork, those who acted as 'gatekeepers', others who distributed survey questionnaires, those who completed them and those fifteen interviewees whose experiences have so keenly shaped this project. Thank you all for your time and efforts. I am particularly grateful to those organisations such as the Birmingham Irish Community Forum, Irish Welfare and Information Centre and Birmingham Irish Youth Group who supported me in undertaking this project and for their tireless wider work on behalf of the local community in Birmingham.

I also wish to thank a considerable number of people, including Mark Kelly, Professor Máirtín Mac an Ghail, Mike Walsh, Seán Hutton and my many friends and colleagues within the Federation of Irish Societies, Birmingham Specialist NHS Trust and elsewhere for innumerable helpful discussions and ceaseless encouragement.

Special thanks to all of those family and friends, who kept asking the question: 'have you finished yet?'

Immeasurable thanks to my parents (Pat and Phil) and my sister Lizzie for their unquestioning support over the last five years and well beyond. Thank you for getting me to this stage and for allowing to so fully appreciate the duality of having been born in Birmingham, yet left me so aware of my connection with Ireland. I would also like to express my love and gratitude to my grandparents, who have helped make me what I am and provided me with the geographical and emotional co-ordinates of my life.

Most of all I wish to thank my partner Eleanor without whom this project would never have been completed. Thank you for all your love, advice, proof-reading and nudges, but most of all for your enduring patience in seeing this thing through to the end with me. I owe you big time!



## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the forms of identity which are adopted by individuals who were born in Birmingham with at least one parent who had been born in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland and the processes of identity formation which give life to these identities.

This thesis places the identity and experiences of the research population within the context of the Anglo-Irish historical relationship, political situation in Northern Ireland and the events surrounding the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings'. It also positions the group in relation to recent academic debates regarding race, ethnicity and 'dominant group identity'. It is intended that this thesis will represent a contribution to these debates and to the understanding of Irish experience in Britain.

The fieldwork phase of the project was conducted in Birmingham and consisted of two distinct, yet overlapping stages. Firstly, a survey of the research population using questionnaires which were distributed to potential respondents by a series of 'gatekeepers'. This provided data and served as a filter to stage two. Secondly, fifteen semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews with members of the cohort.

## Declaration

Except where otherwise stated, this thesis contains an account of my own independent research undertaken within the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick between October 1995 and February 2002, under the supervision of Dr Montserrat Guibernau and Professor Zig Layton Henry.

For Mary and Patrick, Frances and William (Paddy)

## ***Introduction***

This thesis offers an analysis of conceptions of ethnic identity amongst individuals who were born in Birmingham with at least one parent who was born in either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland, here on referred to as 'Second generation Irish' or the research or subject population.

The research sets out to determine what labels of identity members of this grouping choose to adopt. Do such individuals identify as 'Irish', 'British', 'English' or 'Brummies', or do they select a series of labels which reflect different aspects of their heritage and experiences? The research also seeks to discover the rationalisations offered by individuals in order to explain their selected forms of identity and the significance that the individual attaches to the labels they adopt. Crucial to this is their perceptions of their life experiences.

In exploring the forms of identity adopted by members of the research population, I examine the significance of multiple identities for this grouping and seek to challenge the notion forwarded by a former Director of the Liverpool Irish Centre, who cites that as Irish people, upon arrival in England: "you either become English or remain Irish - you cannot be both".<sup>1</sup> I challenge this mindset, arguing that it is not only possible, but a distinct reality for thousands of 'Irish' people who possess a multiple identity which encompasses an aspect of both Irish and British identities. This forms the central hypothesis underpinning this study, that:

*Multiple identities represent a common form of identity adopted by 'Second generation Irish' people.*

### ***(i) Why 'Second Generation Irish' People?***

This population have been selected as the focus of this research study for three specific reasons. Firstly, as I argue at a later point in this introduction, this grouping represents a grossly under-researched grouping within British society. Secondly, 'Second generation Irish' people occupy a peculiar middle ground between the migrant generation of their parents and the remainder of British society, forming an interface between the two groupings and societies in question. Thirdly, as the children of a predominantly 'White' migrant grouping, the 'second generation' of Irish migrants are frequently perceived to have been absorbed into the wider 'White British' grouping.<sup>2</sup> They are predominantly 'white', they attend the same schools and institutions within local society and they, unlike their parents, are not marked out by their accents. Consequently, the opportunity for assimilation is immense. This is evidenced in relation to the Census, which prior to 2001 has not afforded an opportunity for members of this grouping to record their connection with 'Ireland'.<sup>3</sup>

### ***(ii) Why Birmingham?***

The Irish experience in Birmingham in the twentieth century is distinguished from other Irish settlements in four specific ways.

Firstly, the Irish represent the largest migrant group within Birmingham in the period since the Second World War, with substantial Irish communities being established in a number of the city's suburbs.

Secondly, despite the scale of this Irish presence, academics and social commentators have largely overlooked the Irish experience in Birmingham during this period.

Thirdly, the Irish community in Birmingham can almost exclusively be traced to the period since 1922 and predominantly to the post-war period. As I outline in Chapter

Seven, Birmingham was all but overlooked by nineteenth century Irish migrants and it was not until the onset of the twentieth century that Irish people settled in Birmingham in any significant numbers.

Similarly, economic and demographic shifts within the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in the 1970s, meant that by the beginning of the 1980s, Birmingham had ceased to be a major site of Irish settlement. This effectively insulated the Irish community in Birmingham, ensuring that it was a far more homogeneous grouping than that which occurs elsewhere in England, where Irish settlement occurred over a more sustained period.

Finally, the Irish experience in Birmingham is marked out by the events, which are commonly known as the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings'. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) bombing of two public houses in Birmingham city centre in 1974, which killed twenty-one people, injured more than one-hundred and sixty others and totally changed the dynamics of the relationship between the local Irish communities and the wider population of the city.<sup>4</sup> A considerable anti-Irish backlash in the wake of the bombings left the local Irish communities extremely vulnerable, leading it to adopt a lower profile within local society for a considerable period following the events of Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> November 1974.

These four factors create a set of conditions which mean that the Irish experience in Birmingham is unique amongst settlements of Irish people in England in the twentieth century.

### ***(iii) Academic Marginalisation: The Irish in England***

As previously intimated, there is a distinct dearth of academic material relating to the situation of the Irish in England, almost regardless of period or area of academic

study. As Akenson records: "There are no more than a dozen published bodies dealing with Irish social history in Great Britain".<sup>5</sup>

The material which has been produced has largely been the fruits of the small, but bountiful genre of Irish Studies. This has offered an insight into the experiences and realities of Irish people in England, principally in the period since 'the famine'. However, the failure of 'mainstream' history, sociology and anthropology to examine more fully these realities, has ensured that Irish Studies has experienced: "A kind of academic ghettoisation."<sup>6</sup> In light of this, I set out at the beginning of this research study with a desire to produce a thesis which focuses on ethnic identity, which features an Irish grouping as a case study, rather than an Irish Studies thesis, which focuses on the topic of ethnic identity. In doing so, I seek to contribute to the mainstreaming of the study of Irish people within British society and to forward examinations of this group as a valid subject for academic investigation.

The majority of the existing material relating to Irish settlement in England concentrates on settlement in the nineteenth century and specifically in the famine and post-famine periods, with the works of Swift and Gilley, Davis and Fielding offering an insight into the experience of Irish communities in a range of English cities.<sup>7</sup> This research heavily focuses on the experiences of the urban working class and Roman Catholic immigrants, with lesser references to the situation of the middle class Irish and Protestant settlers.<sup>8</sup> The picture one receives from much of the research into the Irish in nineteenth century England is of a people located at the perimeters of society, poverty stricken, denigrated and marginalised.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to being immigrant specific, research has also concentrated on particular towns and cities in Britain, predominantly Manchester, Liverpool, London and York.<sup>10</sup> Other cities such as Birmingham and Newcastle have scarcely been documented.

There still remains no large-scale published account of the historical Irish settlement in Birmingham in the period since 1801.<sup>11</sup> This concentration of effort has also ensured that there have been few comparative or nation-wide examinations of the experiences and situations of Irish people in England.

The dearth of examinations of the Irish in nineteenth century England is further magnified in relation to the Irish in the twentieth century. This period and research grouping have largely been overlooked by social scientists and historians, apparently spurred by a widespread belief that the Irish have been absorbed and assimilated into wider British society.<sup>12</sup> This leads Kiberd to conclude that: "*The Empire Writes Back*, passes over the Irish case very swiftly, perhaps because the authors find these white Europeans too strange an instance to justify their sustained attention."<sup>13</sup>

There is a common pattern of authors acknowledging the situation of the Irish in relation to a range of phenomena within the introduction to their work, before relegating the Irish case to occasional references. For example, Cohen states: "In chapter 1, I identified the Jewish, Palestinian, Irish, African and Armenian diaspora as the principal ones that can be described with the preceding adjective of "victim"."<sup>14</sup> Cohen includes a chapter on four of these, yet unfortunately does not offer a comparable examination of the case of the Irish diaspora. Cohen concentrates almost exclusively on the effects of 'the famine' to explain the creation of the Irish Diaspora, completely overlooking the effects of sustained economic underdevelopment of Ireland: "Whereas the creation of the African diaspora was a prolonged affair, the Palestinians, Armenians and, more uncertainly, the Irish diaspora were propelled by a single set of events."<sup>15</sup> This restricts Cohen's analysis to the mid-nineteenth century, leading him to overlook the almost continual stream of people leaving Ireland in the subsequent period, principally for Britain, the USA and Australia.<sup>16</sup> This, unfortunately is a common problem in relation to the study of



Irish settlement in England. Irish migration is so frequently assumed to be a historical phenomenon.

Such oversights, and the more general absence of the Irish from accounts of migration and settlement in England, not only affects the quantity of material available relating to the Irish, but also ensures that such accounts are incomplete. As Solomos states, Irish migration to Britain: "represents an important, but often ignored, aspect of the historical background to contemporary debates about race and immigration."<sup>17</sup>

This marginalisation of the Irish as a subject of interest is demonstrated by the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) publication: 'Roots of the Future: Ethnic Diversity in the Making of Britain', of which Campbell records: "the authors include an introductory chapter on the history of Irish migrants in Britain. Yet, in subsequent chapters devoted to the contribution of ethnic minorities to British popular culture, the input of Irish-Britons is conspicuously absent."<sup>18</sup> This is largely reflective of the relationship between Irish Studies and wider academia.

In the twentieth century, academic neglect of the Irish reached new levels. The last comprehensive academic study of the Irish in Britain produced by Jackson was published in 1963.<sup>19</sup> Since this milestone there has been relatively little, substantial published work on the subject in England in the last thirty years, beyond conference papers, single chapters and journal articles relating to the Irish in the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Where the latter have occurred, they have tended to concentrate on particular issues, concerns or locations.

In the period since the 1980s, in response to this marginalisation, a new generation of academic and community activists have emerged that have sought to reveal the experiences of the Irish people in England in the twentieth century. It has fallen to

this alliance to offer historical accounts of Irish settlement in England, often in order to articulate their demands for public and social funding for Irish specific projects.<sup>21</sup> These include attempts to counter the imbalances bequeathed by historians and social commentators, with endeavours to document the experiences of Irish women, particularly those in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup>

Amidst this emergence there has been a reprise in academic interest and willingness on the part of academic institutions to allow students to conduct research into the Irish experience and issues affecting Irish people in Britain. There are currently a number of research projects being undertaken at a doctoral level to examine different aspects of the Irish experience, across a range of academic disciplines.<sup>23</sup>

Irish Studies is slowly being drawn into mainstream academia, with historical and contemporary experiences being incorporated into wider discussions regarding ethnicity and migration.<sup>24</sup> This can surely only benefit both Irish Studies and our wider understanding of processes of migration, settlement and assimilation, for the experiences of Irish migrants to Britain over the last two hundred years offers a number of important lessons for the study of more recent settlers in Britain. Unless the Irish are fully included in such debates, then these debates will remain incomplete. As Saggar concludes: "the experience of Irish settlement can be important to our wider understanding of migration."<sup>25</sup>

#### ***(iv) Marginalisation of Irish Settlement in Birmingham***

Academic marginalisation of the Irish is magnified in relation to the Irish in Birmingham. There remains no single, published, large-scale academic or social account of Irish settlement in Birmingham, regardless of period or discipline.<sup>26</sup>

The size of the community and apparent ease of assimilation has led to the Irish in nineteenth century Birmingham being overlooked by generations of commentators. Denvir is one of the few writers, either contemporaneously or subsequently, to offer an insight into their collective experiences.<sup>27</sup> A survey of archival material in Birmingham Central Library reveals few references to the condition of the Irish in Victorian Birmingham.<sup>28</sup> References in historical accounts of Birmingham are limited to one or two line reflections upon the poverty of the inner-city Irish, the 'Murphy Riots' and the tendency to disperse to settle. There are few references to Irish areas:

*"There was no real Irish 'quarter' as such, Irish families tended to integrate with Birmingham families, but some streets did have a large proportion of Irish born, such as Smithfield passage, with its 30% of its residents born in Ireland."*<sup>29</sup>

Such statements appear despite the fact that during the aforementioned 'Murphy Riots' of 1867, a local crowd, incited by anti-Catholic preacher William Murphy, was able to launch attacks upon 'Irish areas' of the city.<sup>30</sup> Despite the apparent focused nature of the attacks upon Irish Catholic targets, Upton maintains: "the Murphy riots were as much a descent into random lawlessness (as had happened in 1791) as any serious breakdown in relations between the two communities."<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, a local history project of Digbeth, an area on the perimeter of Birmingham city centre, which records that those born in Ireland accounted for 160 of the 2,563 people in the area and Italians only 16, affords only two pages to the Irish, while the latter warrant twelve pages.<sup>32</sup>

### ***(v) A Review of Current Literature relating to the Research Population***

The academic marginalisation of the 'Irish in Britain' is most acutely obvious in relation to the experiences of the 'children' of Irish migrants in the latter half of the twentieth century. As Holmes identifies, "There is no general study of the Irish in Britain which carries comprehensive detail on the second and third generations of Irish descent."<sup>33</sup>

There have been a small number of studies of the 'Second generation Irish' in England and research into issues which primarily affect this subject grouping. Hickman offers a critique of the role of Roman Catholic schools in the socialisation of 'Irish' children in England. The central finding is that the Roman Catholic hierarchy has attempted to undermine the significance of notions of Irish identity, replacing this with the conception that these individuals are first and foremost Roman Catholics. This process has contributed to the hastened assimilation of considerable numbers of the research population.

Ullah has also undertaken a study of children from Irish families living in Birmingham and Southwark in London. The study, which included in-depth interviews with school children (100 girls and 42 boys) and informal sessions with young people at a dancing school in Erdington, Birmingham, sought to determine what identities these individuals adopt.<sup>34</sup>

Pearson offers an excellent insight into the experiences of Irish Children looked after within Local Authority Care Homes. Pearson explores a number of case studies of 'Irish children', which draw upon her work with such children around identity issues. One of the principal findings being that their ethnic and cultural heritage is overlooked within these settings.<sup>35</sup>

Whilst welcoming the insight that authors such as Ullah, Hickman and Pearson offer into the experiences of 'Second generation Irish' people, I perceive these to be initial contributions to a developing debate regarding the identity of the 'children' of Irish migrants within British society. This thesis represents a further contribution to this on-going debate.

### ***(vi) Methodological Approach***

There are a number of methodological considerations relating to previous work in this field, which sets this particular piece of research apart from those which have gone before. Firstly, because of ethical considerations, I did not survey or interview anyone under the age of eighteen years during the course of the fieldwork phase. I perceived that there was a serious risk that, if I sought to do so, the research might put questions before these individuals which they are yet to answer for themselves. This might mean that such subjects are more open to interviewer bias and may have a potentially detrimental effect upon the individual's processes of identity formation, creating personal and familial conflicts. This may ultimately succeed in spoiling the field for future researchers.

Secondly, as the research population is the offspring of individuals who were born in either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland, I sought to reflect the diversity of this population, reflecting gender, geographical and denominational differences within this grouping. Consequently, I sought a broader sample than that used by Ullah, which specifically targeted young people in Roman Catholic schools and dancing schools. To achieve this wider coverage I adopted a multi-layered approach to the fieldwork. I distributed three hundred survey questionnaires to members of the research population, via a series of 'gatekeepers' and, in an attempt attract

members of groupings which were hidden or were not easily accessible, I also distributed questionnaires to individuals who had been born in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.<sup>36</sup> The content of the questionnaires ensured that these not only solicited information regarding the individual's perception of their experiences and identity, but also offered multi-generational data about their families. This then became a mechanism to facilitate the distribution of questionnaire to the initial respondent's offspring and siblings. This ensured a far greater spread of subjects, than could have been achieved by simply targeting individuals who could be identified as being the offspring of Irish migrants. The latter would have ensured a bias towards those who accessed Irish cultural activities and venues. Consequently, the questionnaires provided research data regarding subjects, afforded a mechanism to access further research subjects and ultimately served as a filter to the subsequent interview stage.

Survey respondents were crudely divided into three groupings, those who adopted 'Irish' as their primary label of identity, those who identified 'British' or 'English' as their key label and those who selected a multiplicity of labels. A third of interview subjects were drawn from each of these groupings. Individual subjects were then selected according to the demographic make-up of the research population, to ensure age, gender, geographical and religious denominational balance and representativeness. This next stage then took the form of semi-structured, qualitative interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. Both the survey and interview stages of the fieldwork concentrated on the subjects' experiences in childhood and adulthood and their perceptions of their identity and the labels which they chose to adopt. In total of one hundred and twenty individuals were surveyed, including ninety members of the research population and fifteen interviews were undertaken.

### ***(vii) Terminology***

During the course of this thesis, I use a number of terms whose meaning it is important to clarify and define.

Firstly, in using the term 'Ireland', I refer to the geographical landmass of the island of Ireland, incorporating both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This is not guided by adherence to any political agenda, but rather the needs of ease and expediency.

Secondly, I frequently use the terms 'Second generation' and 'Second generation Irish' to refer to members of the research population. I do so, despite the fact that such terms are inherently hierarchical, suggesting divisions amongst Irish communities, according to generational considerations. Once again, I adopt these terms, despite considerable reservations, simply for ease of analysis.

Finally, in referring to subjects as 'Irish', I merely denote their connection with Ireland, via their parents, rather than pre-judging their identity. In doing so, I acknowledge their potential capacity to adopt an 'Irish' identity.

### ***(viii) Structure of the Thesis***

Chapter One outlines and considers different academic interpretations of identity and specifically the appropriateness of the national, social, cultural and ethnic notions of identity for the research population. It also explores a number of 'Properties of Identity', forwarding that identity is essentially socially constructed, fluid and highly contextual, exploring these factors for the identity of members of the research population.

Chapter Two applies Smith's '*Six dimensions of ethnics*' to the case of the 'Irish in Birmingham' and examines a number of recent critiques of notions of ethnic identity.

Chapter Three focuses on the Jenkins' work outlining the relationship between 'Internal' and 'External' definition and the notion that identity formation is a two-way process, in which the individual categorises her/himself and is simultaneously categorised by others within society.

Chapter Four then offers an account of the methodological approach adopted, including the rationale for the multi-layered structure of the twin-pronged strategy.

Chapter Five applies the learning from the first three chapters, to examine the position of the research population within contemporary conceptualisations of an Irish diaspora.

Chapter Six explores the role of 'Dominant Group Ethnicity' for formulations of minority group ethnic identity. I apply Doane and Jenkins' work on 'Dominant Group Ethnicity' and 'Majority Ethnicity' to the situation of the research population, exploring the role of Britain and British identity for conceptualisations of Irish identity, both in Ireland and in Britain. It concludes with an exploration of the research population's experience of Duality. Central to this is a consideration of the notion that this grouping is essentially the product of two societies and that this places particular demands and expectations upon them.

Chapter Seven offers an account of Irish settlement in Birmingham, principally in the post-war period. I plot the development of a series of Irish settlements throughout the city and the notion of a developing sense of an Irish community within local society. I concentrate upon the pivotal role played within the development of this relationship by the events surrounding the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings' of 1974. I explore the significance of these events for the Irish communities in the city and specifically for the research population.

Chapter Eight provides an analysis of the survey phase of the fieldwork.



Chapter Nine details the analysis of the interview phase of the fieldwork, incorporating fifteen in-depth interviews.

Chapter Ten outlines the major findings and conclusions to emanate from the research, together with an outline of areas requiring further research. This is followed by a complete bibliography and appendices.

### ***References***

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<sup>1</sup> Moving up the Social Pyramid, The Times, 16/02/71

<sup>2</sup> Walter, B. Challenging the Black/White Binary: The Need for an Irish Category in the 2001 Census, 1998, p.73

<sup>3</sup> The 1971 Census afforded individuals the opportunity to record their parents' places of birth, thus allowing us to gauge the size of the 'Second generation Irish' population. This however does not record the position of subsequent generations. The 2001 Census included a separate 'Irish' category within the ethnic monitoring section. This for the first time will allow us to gauge the true size of the Irish community in England and Wales.

<sup>4</sup> Hill, P. J. Forever Lost, Forever Gone, 1996, p.3

<sup>5</sup> Akenson, D. H. The Irish Diaspora: A Primer, 1996, p.190

<sup>6</sup> Fielding, S. Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England 1880-1939, 1993, p.xiii

<sup>7</sup> Fielding, S. 1993, Davis, G. Irish in Britain (1815-1914) 1991, Finnegan, F. Poverty and Prejudice: A Study of Irish Immigrants in York 1840-75, 1982, Swift, R. & Gilley, S. The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939, 1989, MacRaild, D. M. Irish Migrants in Modern Britain 1750-1922, Social History in Perspective Series, 1999

<sup>8</sup> A number of authors offer an insight into the position of Protestant migrants to Britain: MacRaild, D. M. 1999, pp.100-122, Davis, G. 1991, pp.124-158, Akenson, D. H. 1996, pp.189-215

<sup>9</sup> Various contributors to Swift, R. & Gilley, S. 1989 underline the marginalised nature of much Irish settlement in Victorian Britain, as does MacRaild, D. M. 1999 and Davis, G. 1991. However all underline the fact that whilst the Irish were marginalised, they were not pushed back into ghettos.

<sup>10</sup> Finnegan, F. 1982, Hollen Lees, L. Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London, 1979, Neal, F. Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience 1819-1914. An Aspect of Anglo-Irish History, 1988, Swift, R. The Outcast Irish in the British Victorian city: problems and perspectives, 1987, pp.264-276, Busteed, M. & Hodgson, R. Irish Migration and Settlement in Early Nineteenth Century Manchester – With Special Reference to the Angel Meadows, 1994

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<sup>11</sup> Historical examinations of the Irish in Birmingham are currently being undertaken by Peach, A. Ph.D. Leicester De Montford University and Chinn, C. Dr. Birmingham Library Services

<sup>12</sup> Ryan, L. Irish Emigration to Britain since World War II, in Kearney, R. (Ed.), Migrations: The Irish at Home and Abroad, 1990, p.45 in Akenson, D. H. 1996, p.211, Akenson also offers a wider discussion of assimilation, pp.211-213.

<sup>13</sup> Kiberd, D. Inventing Ireland: The Literature of Modern Ireland, 1996, pp.4-5

<sup>14</sup> Cohen, R. Global Diasporas: An Introduction, 1997, p.31

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, R. 1997, p.35

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, R. 1997, pp.69-70

<sup>17</sup> Solomos, J. Race and Racism in Britain, 1993, p.40

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, S. Race of Angels: The Critical Reception of Second-generation Irish Musicians, 1998, p.161

<sup>19</sup> Jackson, J. A. The Irish in Britain, 1963. O'Connor, K. produced a book bearing the same title in 1972, however O'Connor is a journalist and this is not based on academic exploration.

<sup>20</sup> A notable exception is the Irish Series Worldwide, edited by O'Sullivan, P. this includes a number of papers listed below. Greenslade, L. The Health of the Irish People in Britain: A Pilot Study Proposal, 1990, Greenslade, L. Caoineann an Lon Dubh, 1994 Greenslade, L. The Blackbird Calls in Grief: Colonialism, Health and Identity Among Irish Immigrants in Britain, in MacLaughlin, J. (ed.) Dislocation and Location In Contemporary Irish Society: Emigration and Irish Identities, 1997, pp.209-235, Cochrane, R. & Stopes-Roe, M. Psychological Disturbance in Ireland, in England and in Irish Emigrants to England: A Comparative Study, 1979, pp.301-20, Hazelkorn, E. Irish Immigrants Today: A Socio-Economic Profile of Contemporary Irish Emigrants and Immigrants in the UK, 1990, Hickman, M. J. Racism and Identity: Issues for the Irish in Britain, in Ranger, T. et al (eds.), Culture, Identity and Politics: Ethnic Minorities in Britain, 1996, Hanlon, G. A Continuation or a Break with the Past?, in O'Sullivan, P, (ed.), Patterns of Migration, 1992, Kells, M. Ethnic Identity Amongst Young Irish Middle Class Migrants in London, 1995, Kells, M. I am Myself and Nobody Else: Gender and Ethnicity Among Middle-Class Irish Women in London in O'Sullivan, P. (ed.), Irish Women and Irish Migration, 1997, pp.201-234 Kells, M. Religion and the Irish Migrant, 1994 Kenny, M. Out of the Way: Being Irish in England, 1975, pp.272-3, Hickman, M. J. Reconstructing, Deconstructing 'Race': British Political Discourses about the Irish in Britain, 1998, Kirwan, F. X. & Nairn, A. G. Migrant Employment and the Recession – The Case of the Irish in Britain, 1983, Lennon, M. et al, Across the Water: Irish Women's Lives in Britain, 1988, McConville, B. The London Irish, 1982, O'Meachair, G. The Irish: Britain's Forgotten migrants, 1998, pp.18-19, Owen, D. National Ethnic Minority Data: Irish-Born People in Great Britain - Settlement Patterns and Socio-Economic Circumstances, 1991, 1995, Weightman, G. Paddy

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<sup>21</sup> Barron, L. I'm Proud of My Irish Roots, 1996, Boland, B. Roots and Realities - A Profile of Irish Women in London, 1993, Egan, K. & Tilki, M. Limited Opportunities: Economic Disadvantage and Access to Housing for Single Irish Women, 1995, Walter, B. Irish Women in London: The Ealing Dimension, 1989, Williams, I. et al. A Report to the Economic Development Department on the Economic Needs of the Irish Community in Birmingham. 1996, London Irish Women's Centre, Roots and Realities: A Profile of Irish Women in London, 1993

<sup>22</sup> Lennon, M et al. 1988, Boland, B. 1993, Egan, K. & Tilki, M. 1995, Walter, B. 1989, London Irish Women's Centre, 1993, Gray, B. Unmasking Irishness: Irish Women, the Irish Nation and the Irish Diaspora, in MacLaughlin, J. (ed.) 1997, pp.209-235 Kells, M. 1995, p.201, Kells, M. 1994, Kells, M. in P. O'Sullivan, 1997, pp.201-234, Wall, R. Leading Lives: Irish Women in Britain, 1991

<sup>23</sup> Work is currently being undertaken by Peach, A. The Irish in Birmingham until 1870, Leicester De Montford University, Campbell, S. Liverpool John Moores University & Arrowsmith, A, Staffordshire University. The latter two are both undertaking 'Second Generation' specific work.

<sup>24</sup> Miles, R. Racism and Migrant Labour, 1982, Solomos, J. Race and Racism in Britain, 1993, Walvin, J. Passage to Britain, 1984, Saggar, S. Race and Politics in Britain: Contemporary Political Studies, 1992, Holmes, C, A Tolerant Country? Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities in Britain, 1991

<sup>25</sup> Saggar, S. 1992, p.30

<sup>26</sup> There are unpublished pieces such as Zeisler, K. I. 1989, Ullah, P. Second Generation Irish Youth: A Social Psychological Investigation of a Hidden Minority, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1983 and ongoing work by Peach, A. & Chinn, C. (Dr.)

<sup>27</sup> Denvir, J, The Irish In Britain, 1892, Bird, V. A Portrait of Birmingham, 1974, Chinn, C. Poverty Amidst Prosperity: The Urban Poor in England 1834-1914, 1995, Chinn, C. The Great Working City: Birmingham, 1994 Ethnic Origins of Birmingham Children (1966-81), Birmingham Central Statistical Office, (Undated), Edwards, J. R. et al, Social Patterns in Birmingham, 1970, Free, M. Playing the Other: Meditation on the 1994 Soccer World Cup and the Construction of Irish Cultural Identity in Birmingham, 1995 Greenslade, L. Distress in the Irish Community in Birmingham: A Preliminary Report to Social Services Department, Birmingham City Council, 1991, Harrison, P. The Irish-English in Barker, P. (ed.), The Other Britain, 1982 Mullin, C. Error of Judgement: The Truth about the Birmingham Pub Bombings,

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<sup>28</sup> Garry, K. In Search of a National Identity: A Personal Evaluation as a Second Generation Woman in England, 1990, p.2

<sup>29</sup> Hopkins, G. 1987, p.41

<sup>30</sup> A short overview of the Murphy Riots can be found in MacRaild, D. M. 1999, pp.176-180,

<sup>31</sup> Upton, C. 1993, p.104

<sup>32</sup> Hopkins, G. 1987

<sup>33</sup> Holmes, C, A Tolerant Country? Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities in Britain, 1991, p.1

<sup>34</sup> Ullah, P. Second Generation Irish Youth: A Social Psychological Investigation of a Hidden Minority, 1983

<sup>35</sup> Pearson, M. 1994

<sup>36</sup> A copy of the Questionnaire can be found in Appendix One

## **Chapter One: Theories of Identity**

### ***(1.i) Introduction***

There are three distinct components of this chapter. The first offers an examination of baseline definitions of identity.

The second explores a number of properties of identity, specifically identity as constructed, fluid and contextual. I apply the discussion of each of these to the specific situation of the Irish in Birmingham, in order to discover how they impact upon identity formation processes amongst the subject population.

Finally, I consider the significance of different academic interpretations of identity. I focus on national, cultural, social and ethnic based explorations, in an attempt to determine which of these provides the most appropriate interpretation for an examination of 'Second generation Irish' identity in Birmingham.

### ***(1.ii) Definitions of Identity***

Erikson warns of the problematic nature of attempting to derive a coherent and workable definition of identity. He argues: "The more one writes about the subject, the more the word becomes a term for something as unfathomable as it is all-pervasive."<sup>1</sup> He writes:

*"Identity' and 'identity crisis' have in popular and scientific usage become terms which alternately circumscribe something so large and so seemingly self-evident that to demand a definition would almost seem petty, while at other times they designate something made so narrow for purposes of measurement that the overall meaning is lost, and it could just as well be called something else."*<sup>2</sup>

In spite of Erikson's warning I now seek to define, outline and examine the concept of identity and the processes associated with identity formulation. In doing so, I principally turn to the fields of sociology and social psychology.

A useful starting point in any attempt to derive a workable definition of identity is provided by Weinreich:

*"One's identity is defined as the totality of one's self-construal, in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to the future."*<sup>3</sup>

Weinreich's definition of identity, which has heavily influenced my own understanding of the concept for the purposes of this thesis, emphasises a number of key aspects. Firstly, he acknowledges the role of the self in the definition of one's identity.

Secondly, the important relationship between the past, present and future and the individual's position in relation to each of these. The individual, in defining his/her own identity is constantly making sense of the realities and experiences of her/his forebears, whilst considering her/his own situation in contemporary society and her/his 'aspirations' for the future. It is in balancing these realities that (s)he achieves her/his place in society and constructs her/his identity.

Thirdly, Weinreich emphasises the importance of the notion that the individual places upon these events and phenomena in order to make sense of her/his identity. This is echoed by Jenkins who states that identity is not "just there", "it must always be established".<sup>4</sup> Identity is not a set of rules and experiences that the individual

receives intact from her/his forebears, but rather is something that is established through her/his interaction with society, the past and the future.<sup>5</sup>

Guibernau expands our understanding of identity by highlighting the psychological and social dimensions of the concept, explaining that: "Identity is a definition, an interpretation of the self that establishes what and where the person is in both social and psychological terms."<sup>6</sup> The individual's identity allows them to understand their own position psychologically, whilst permitting themselves to be placed and to place themselves within society's structures. In this respect, identity takes on distinct, yet intertwined personal and social roles.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Jenkins underlines a point that is crucial for the focus of this thesis: the notion that identity formation must be viewed as a continuum; he states that "Identity can in fact only be understood as a process."<sup>8</sup>

Within these broad and differing definitions of the term identity, we have a number of key concepts that lie at the heart of this thesis.

### ***(1.iii) Properties of Identity***

Having explored baseline definitions of identity, I now examine the impact of a number of processes and phenomena, which collectively underpin contemporary conceptions of identity. These reflect and affect the nature of identity and processes associated with identity formation. These are specifically that all identity is socially constructed, inherently fluid and highly contextual.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Identity as a Construct***

The individual is subject to all manner of influences, nothing that (s)he does is done in isolation, it is always acted out in response to, or in recognition of external factors.

In Friedman's words: "The construction of identity is an elaborate and deadly serious game of mirrors. It is a complex temporal interaction of multiple practices of identification external and internal to a subject or population."<sup>10</sup>

Rex states that identity is 'socially created'.<sup>11</sup> I would go further and argue that it can be nothing else. We are born as individuals with nothing, other than genetic and biological material; we are subject to the shaping of society and the other individuals and groups that we encounter during the processes that lead to the formation of our identity or identities.<sup>12</sup> As Chambers argues:

*"Just as the narrative of the nation involves the construction of an 'imaginary community', a sense of belonging sustained as much by fantasy and the imagination as by any geographical or physical reality, so our sense of our selves is also a labour of the imagination, a fiction, a particular story that makes sense."*<sup>13</sup>

During the course of our lives, particularly the period of primary socialisation that takes place in childhood and adolescence we come to occupy a number of social roles and functions. As part of this process, we internalise many of the conceptions society holds of the groups with which we identify.<sup>14</sup> This process of learning and 'choosing' is achieved through our interaction with society, be it within the context of various social groups or in our contact with other individuals and groups. In fulfilling society's expectations and conceptions of particular groups we send out signals to others about who and what we are. Chapter Three offers a more detailed exploration of processes of socialisation.

The construction of personal identity is witnessed in the experiences of a significant number of the current research population. In the period between birth and the age of five years, the child is likely to be primarily socialised within the home and the



local community of family and friendship networks. For such individuals many of their immediate influences and stimuli within this period are likely to be Irish. At least one of their parents will be Irish and they may be surrounded by other Irish people and Irish cultural forms. Then at the age of five years (s)he begins to attend school, where (s)he is likely to encounter non-Irish influences; teachers, the mainstream curriculum and other pupils. (S)he then begins to take on aspects from these influences, incorporating them into her/his personal identity.

### ***Identity as Fluid***

If one accepts the proposition that all identity is socially constructed; then one all but acknowledges that identity is subject to constant change and reformation; that it is essentially a fluid phenomena. The primary period of socialisation plays a central role in shaping the identity of the individual. It is however important to underline that the transition from adolescence to adulthood does not mark the end of the processes of identity formation. It is merely a significant landmark in the life of the individual. The process of identity formation is a lifelong process. The individual sub-consciously adapts her/his identity in response to their everyday interaction with society and constantly re-evaluates their personal identity.

The notion that identity formation is a never-ending process is underlined by Hall who argues that an individual's identity: "always remains incomplete, is always 'in process'." <sup>15</sup>

This theme is echoed by Chambers who argues that "Such a journey is open and incomplete, it involves a continual fabulation, an invention, a construction, in which there is no fixed identity or final destination."<sup>16</sup>

In constructing our identity or identities we constantly try to make sense of our experiences and surroundings:

*"Psychoanalytically, the reason why we continually search for 'identity', constructing biographies which knit together the different parts of our divided selves into a unity, is to recapture this fantasised pleasure of fullness (plenitude)."*<sup>17</sup>

The identity of an individual is subject to a myriad of different influences both in the formulation and development stages. As I demonstrate more fully in Chapter Three, both internal and external elements help to shape the identity of the individual. The influence of such a large number of variables means that it is almost inevitable that an individual's identity should be in a constant state of adaptation, modification and even turmoil. As Rex states: "The individual is continually confronted with new situations and objects and must redefine his or her identity in relation to these objects."<sup>18</sup>

The fluid nature of identity is such that: "The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy."<sup>19</sup>

If one refers back to the scenario outlined in relation to the notion of identity as constructed, it is possible to trace the fluid nature of identity amongst the subject population. The subject's identity evolves during the first five years of her/his life, shaped by a myriad of influences; parents, other family members, access to Ireland and Irish culture. (S)he takes from each of these, modifying (consciously and sub-consciously) her/his identity as (s)he progresses through childhood and adolescence into adulthood.

The fluidity of identity is also stressed by the fact that the same individual may offer different interpretations of her/his identity at various points of her/his life. At the age of ten, prompted by the messages (s)he receives from her/his parents, (s)he may simply state "I am Irish". By the age of twenty years, influenced by experiences within local society, (s)he may seek to acknowledge this attachment by recording

that (s)he is an 'Irish Brummie', or alternatively to reject any notion that (s)he is Irish and state "I am British".

### ***Identity as Contextual***

Inherent in the notion that identity is both constructed and fluid is the influence of location and locality. I now add the final piece to this jigsaw, arguing that processes of identity formation are affected by the context in which the individual or group finds her/himself. In examining the relationship between contextuality and identity, I concentrate on three specific factors: location and locality, different interpretations of identity over time, and the reality of 'playing to different audiences'. I then explore the significance of these factors for Irish people in Birmingham, specifically in relation to Multiple Identities.

#### ***(a) Location and Locality***

As established during the course of this chapter, the individual's perception of their self and her/his resulting identity, is closely tied to the actions of other members of society, be they in direct contact or not. The influence of wider society implies that the types of identity that individuals adopt are likely to be heavily dictated by their location.

Birmingham as a city is likely to play a fundamental role in the lives of and in ultimately shaping the identity of Irish people in the city, regardless of place of birth. Many of those who were born in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland will have spent considerable periods of time in the city, possibly more time than in Ireland itself. Many will have partners, families, careers and be settled on an all but permanent basis.

For those who were born in the city, the ties to Birmingham are likely to be even closer. The vast majority will have been educated and socialised within local society and much of their immediate circles of family and friends are likely to be based in the city.

For both sets of individuals, the city is likely to play a key, if differing, role in the formation of their identity. It provides the context within which their ethnic identity is located, developed and modified.

A crucial factor is likely to reside in the attitudes of wider society towards Irish people and the local Irish community. These attitudes are likely to dictate whether it is possible for Irish people to proclaim their ethnicity and ethnic identity in public, without fear of prejudice, discrimination and even the threat of physical attack. This will have a profound effect upon the environment in which Irish people, particularly members of the research population, are able to develop a coherent identity in a safe environment.

The locational context is particularly apposite to the situation of the Irish community in Birmingham. The experience of the research population is heavily shaped by the events of the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings' of November 1974. These events sparked a fervent anti-Irish backlash, prompting the local Irish community to adopt a lower public profile.<sup>20</sup> This coupled with the legislation such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and events in Northern Ireland created great suspicion of the local Irish population. This situation is likely to have affected the way in which individuals have identified, labelled and conducted themselves within local settings. A contributor to Lennon et al's 'Across the Water' recalls her mother reaction to Republican bombing campaigns: "Whenever there was a bomb scare, she used to say that she'd ask for her fare in a really low voice 'cause she didn't want them to know that she was Irish

- it used to pain me to think of it."<sup>21</sup> There are innumerable similar accounts of individuals toning down their accents, side-stepping discussions about Northern Ireland and generally avoiding overt displays of Irishness.<sup>22</sup> This is likely to have had a profound effect upon the ways in which individuals have constructed and displayed their identity. For some, the hostility may have discouraged them from adopting a form of Irish identity, led others to conceal their ethnicity in particular settings or alternatively, served to strengthen their sense of identity. As Seamus McGarry states: "it is difficult to express our opinions without being given the violent tag."<sup>23</sup> Jenkins suggests that the pressure placed upon a minority community to assimilate into wider society can have the opposite affect, leading to a strengthening of the minority identity. For the current research population, this situation is compounded by the undoubted problems associated with the problems of adopting a British national identity. This is explored in greater depth at a later point.

In relation to the situation in Birmingham, it is important to bring the analysis up to date. If one supports the assertion that the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings' have inhibited the development of Irish identities amongst sections of the community, so the positivity that has been associated with developments such as the success of Irish cultural forms, 'Riverdance', McDonagh's 'Beauty Queen of Lenane' the ubiquitous 'Irish theme bar' and the reprise of the Birmingham St Patrick's Day Parade, must surely have had the opposite effect. I argue that this positivity is likely to have fundamentally impacted upon processes of individual identity formation and undoubtedly made it easier for individuals to adopt and to reinforce a sense of Irish identity within the city.

The significance of location for identity formation processes ultimately means that there are likely to be profound differences between notions of Irish identity and what it means to be Irish across different parts of the Irish diaspora.<sup>24</sup> The modification of

Irish identity within different cities, in response to local pressures is likely to lead to different manifestations of what would be widely accepted as the same ethnic identities. For example, Irish identity in Birmingham will be different to Irish identity in London or Manchester, each is affected by factors such as the extent of local Irish community organisation, access to cultural activities and wider societal attitudes. Consequently, context is pivotal to the construction of identity.

This all has profound consequences in relation to Jenkins' discussion of 'nominal' and 'virtual' identities. Jenkins records that the notion of the 'nominal' identification refers to the name and accompanying classification of the identity that an individual adopts, while "virtual identification encompasses the consequences of the name and label (i.e. what the nominal means, in terms of experience."<sup>25</sup> For example, the 'nominal' identification for Irish people would be 'Irish'; this remains fixed over time (unless the identity is abandoned totally). The 'virtual' identity is the experience of living as an Irish person and the meaning that this affords to the name. In contrast, the virtual identification is likely to adapt over time.<sup>26</sup> As Jenkins states: "Individuals may share a nominal identity, but that may mean very different things to them in practice, it may have different consequences for their lives, they may 'do' it differently."<sup>27</sup>

Within the Irish diaspora one naturally talks of notions of Irishness and a 'nominal' Irish identity, but can we really suggest that Irish identity is a fixed concept, unchanging across Irish communities in Great Britain and the rest of the world? Or alternatively, should we seek to concentrate on the 'virtual' identities that individuals, seek to adopt in different contexts? I argue that it would be all but impossible to construct an argument that supports the notion that there is one 'Irish' identity and that local considerations play little or no role in the configuration of this universal conception of Irish identity. Instead, I support the principle of a 'nominal'

interpretation of Irishness, whilst underlining the important role that locality plays in shaping the 'virtual' identities of Irish people across the diaspora. This forms the basis of the forthcoming chapters. I conclude that the identity the individual develops is likely to differ according to their location, their social position and the attitudes of wider society.

### ***(b) Differences over time***

As I demonstrate in relation to the fluid nature of identity, it is also important to acknowledge the role of time as a factor within identity formation processes.

Identity undoubtedly takes different forms over time. In Birmingham, Irish identity has been heavily influenced by developments within local society, Irish society and wider Irish diaspora. For example, the urbanisation and secularisation of Irish society in the period since the 1960s is likely to mean that the nature of Irish identity evident in Ireland in the 1990s will be radically different to that which would have been found in post-war Ireland. Most notably, in the Republic of Ireland, the influence of Catholicism and nationalism, once the driving forces of political, civic and social life have receded considerably in this period.<sup>28</sup> This has had a profound effect, not only upon Ireland, but also the wider diaspora.

It is also important to acknowledge the significance of time as a variable in relation to developments across different generations. Each generation is likely to have profoundly different takes on what it means to occupy a particular identity – in this case, what it means to be Irish. Those who were born in Birmingham will offer a different criterion for Irishness than someone who was born in Dublin, Cork or Monaghan. This is likely to draw upon their own experiences of Irish society, Irish attitudes and access to Irish culture. One interesting example that has emerged in Birmingham in recent years is that a number of people who were born in

Birmingham have become involved in local Irish community politics, in order to articulate the demands of their community. It is arguably easier for many of these individuals to do so because they did not live through the period after the Birmingham Pub Bombings and did not experience the same levels of harassment and discrimination endured by their parent's generation. In addition, this grouping is likely to have a greater experience of the education system and political institutions than the previous generation.

I believe that the 1990s has seen the emergence of a more broad-based, inclusive interpretation of Irishness. This manifests itself most obviously in the different interpretations of Irish identity and what it means to be Irish.<sup>29</sup> This allows individuals to combine notions of their gender, sexual orientation and location with an ethnic Irish identity, as a symbol of the diversity within Irish society and Irish communities.<sup>30</sup> Such changes have also been supported by the emergence of the 'Celtic Tiger', which has sponsored more positive images of Ireland internationally. This is likely to have contributed to a positivity that has been augmented by developments within local Irish communities in Britain and the Northern Ireland Peace Process. As Jerry Kivlehen of the London Irish Centre states: "During the cease-fire, there seemed to be greater freedom, a chance to celebrate the uplifting side of Irish culture. But when the bombs go off, many Irish people get wary."<sup>31</sup>

These and other developments within Irish society and the wider diaspora have, I believe, lead to a situation in which individuals have learnt to adapt their identity and identities to suit the locations in which they find themselves. As previously recorded, Irish identity will differ from place to place and from generation to generation. This adaptability then leads to the final interpretation of the contextual nature of identity: the notion that individuals possess a range of interpretations of their identities, that can be drawn upon in different situations.



### ***(c) Playing to Different Audiences***

Abner Cohen argues that ethnic identities are subject to adaptation according to the situations in which the individual finds him/herself at a particular time: "When questioned different men gave different reasons for performing certain patterns of behaviour and the same man may give different reasons for performing the same act at different times."<sup>32</sup>

An Irish person may act differently and respond in different ways dependent upon whether (s)he is surrounded by other Irish people or by members of other ethnic groups. Similarly, many members of the Irish community have found it difficult to speak out on the subject of Northern Ireland because, within certain quarters of British society, opposition to government action is seen as support for 'terrorism'.<sup>33</sup>

Horowitz emphasises the contextual nature of identity by stating that:

*"Ascriptive identity is heavily contextual. It embraces multiple levels or tiers, and it changes with the environment. An African student in France will identify himself in one way; at home, in another. A Lebanese will content himself with his sectarian affiliation (Maronite or Orthodox, Sunnite or Shiite, for example); under other circumstances, he will be compelled to consider himself broadly as a Christian or Muslim. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of ascriptive identities, all levels do not remain equally significant, if only because all contexts do not remain so."*<sup>34</sup>

The reality of having to play to different audiences means that individuals have to adopt a series of personas or identities in order both to satisfy these audiences and to reflect different aspects of their heritage. It is important to note that this is different to the notion of multiple identities whereby an individual adopts a series of

labels to reflect different aspects of their reality and heritage, as part of an all-encompassing aggregate, which forms a further approach to the question of competing demands and affiliations.

The existence of multiple personas, multiple realities and indeed multiple identities mean that there is no one, single type of 'Irish' identity, but rather a variety of types of Irishness and ways of being 'Irish' which come together to form the global collective that is the Irish diaspora. These reflect the differences between female and male, Roman Catholic and Protestant, lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual and countless other social cleavages. This also means that no one group has an exclusive claim to the label 'Irish' and the notion of Irishness, consequently those who are born in Birmingham, Melbourne or Boston have as much right to label themselves as 'Irish' as those who are born in Dublin, Belfast or Monaghan.

The three properties of identity that I have thus far outlined; its constructed nature, fluidity and contextuality, come together to produce particular types of Irish identity in Birmingham. The experience of growing up and being socialised in Birmingham, with at least one parent who was born in Ireland and the pressures associated with being Irish during this period has produced notions of Irish identity that are profoundly different to those that are found in the wider diaspora.

Having established a number of baseline definitions of identity and the properties which together give life to this concept, it is important to examine different academic understandings of identity, in order to clarify the precise notion of identity to be adopted for the purposes of this study.

### ***(1.iv) Academic Interpretations of Identity***

A myriad of interpretations of what identity is have been formulated within different academic disciplines. Many of these have passed from academia into our everyday lexicon. Thus references to terms and concepts such as national identity, cultural identity, social identity and ethnic identity have, for varying reasons, become commonplace within modern society. In order to derive a workable understanding of the processes of identity formation as experienced by members of the current research population, I propose that it is necessary to determine which of these broad academic interpretations of identity represents the most concrete basis for this study. This approach is adopted particularly with a non-identity studies and non-sociological audience in mind. My intention here is not to offer an exhaustive exploration of theories of identity, such exercises have been undertaken elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> Rather, my aim is to isolate which of these broad understandings is most appropriate to the examination of identity formation amongst the current case study. I begin by attempting to determine whether national identity provides such a basis of understanding.

### ***National Identity***

The concept of national identity emphasises the role of the nation-state as a core organising stimuli and focus for identification, with the nation-state arguably representing one of the most expansive and all pervading principles of the modern era.<sup>36</sup> The nation-state is made up of a political unit or collectivity of individuals claiming the same origins, experiences, destinies and aspirations. The nation-state lays claim to a given territory and the right to defend that territory against all other nations.<sup>37</sup>

The nation-state inculcates its citizens with a sense of belonging and reinforces the centrality of the nation through the mass media and education systems. This promotes a sense of affinity between individual and nation.<sup>38</sup> The nation becomes the focus of the individual, who identifies with and aspires to be one of its constituent parts. This then becomes a central focus of their identity, with their national identity representing a primary marker of identification.

Key to this centrality is the notion of difference, the sense that the individual, in identifying her/himself with the nation, is also distinguishing her/himself from those who lie outside the nation. As Salecl states:

*"It is first necessary to emphasise that with all nationalism, national identification with 'our kind' is based on the fantasy of an enemy, an alien who has insinuated himself into our society and constantly threatens us with habits, discourse and rituals which are not 'our kind'."*<sup>39</sup>

Salecl concludes that: "No matter what the Other 'does', his very existence is perceived as threatening."<sup>40</sup>

Within academic discourses that place a central emphasis upon national identity, there is a keen concentration on the ties between the nation, history and individual. As Hall states: "the narrative of the nation – It lends significance and importance to our humdrum existence, connecting our everyday lives with a national destiny that pre-existed us and will outlive us."<sup>41</sup>

Guibernau adds: "national identity gives strength and resilience to individuals in so far as it reflects their own identification with an entity – the nation – that transcends them."<sup>42</sup>

National identity draws together a number of disparate factors; history, culture, language and ties these together in a coherent label: 'English', 'Irish', 'British' or 'German'.

Whilst the concept of national identity provides an important contribution to our understanding of identity across a range of societies, I suggest that its usefulness in furthering our understanding of identity formation within the current research population is somewhat limited.

Firstly, a central concern is that an emphasis upon the individual's attachment to the nation as her core identity, risks over-emphasising one element of a range of facets of identity. This arguably attributes a significance to the nation which is disproportionate to its true influence within contemporary society. As Gellner argues, the nation has assumed a position within modern society that does not reflect its true standing: "Having a nation is not an inherent attribute of humanity, but it has now come to appear as such."<sup>43</sup> Rex, critiquing Gellner, argues that he effectively infers that "the artificially created nation, occurs in the modern period and seems to be in conflict with all earlier forms of social solidarity, belonging and identity."<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, national identity represents a core identity, which is essentially inflexible. The very doctrine of the nation-state; nationalism requires the adherence of the individual to that nation and no other.<sup>45</sup> Hall argues that a fixed notion of identity that concentrates on the significance of the nation as a primary indicator is somewhat misleading: "Modern nations are all cultural hybrids".<sup>46</sup> This means that

the individual cannot divide her loyalties between two nations: even where this reflects her heritage. Consequently, such an interpretation can offer little assistance in the study of a group whose origins are to be found within the British and Irish national groupings. This is exacerbated by the fact that for more than eight hundred years, Irish and English and later British identity have effectively been constructed in opposition to one another.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the term national identity is intrinsically bound up in the desire to see the establishment of a nation-state. The group at the centre of this research is not seeking to establish an Irish nation-state within, or in opposition to the British nation-state. Rather they seek to reflect their origins and heritage, within the context of a multi-ethnic Britain. The embracing of an Irish 'national' label merely reflects their association with Ireland, rather than their political aims.

Concerns about overplaying the significance of the nation within society and more localised concerns about the applicability of national identity to the current case study means that we must look elsewhere for a more appropriate understanding of identity which can aid an examination of the grouping at the centre of this research.

### ***Cultural Identity***

Just as national identity focuses on the Nation as the core of the basis of identity, so those who forward the notion of cultural identity as a primary branch of identity theory underline that identity is mediated by a particular culture and a set of cultural symbols.<sup>48</sup> Individuals make sense of these cultural symbols through their connection with their ancestors. Their identity is therefore primarily shaped by reference to their membership of a cultural group.

Cornell and Hartmann argue that debates regarding identity have moved beyond Weber's initial conception of identity, arguing that there has been a shift away from "putative origins and shared history", "to ...shared culture, to what group members now do."<sup>49</sup>

Each cultural group possesses its own set of rules and conventions that govern membership of the group and distinguish it from other groups within society. These rules may relate to religious, linguistic or traditional considerations to which members of the group must align themselves. These conventions are invariably rooted in the history of the group and considerable store is placed on the ability to trace these back through innumerable generations. Hall stresses that cultural identities are created through "the retelling of the past".<sup>50</sup> Having been inherited, these cultural rules are adapted and given their "own structure and dynamic".<sup>51</sup> Hall indicates the use of the past and the perception of the experiences of one's ancestors to validate the group's current situation.

The cultural norms of the group provide a framework according to which individuals should seek to lead their lives: "Culture consists of a set of moral, aesthetics, technical and legal rules as well as the artefacts appropriate to the carrying out of culturally required forms of actions. Culture provides the rules for the performance of these tasks."<sup>52</sup> This framework is the criteria by which individuals are judged by their peers and community leaders. As Rex states, the individual is: "caught by the necessity of acting in accordance with cultural rules."<sup>53</sup> The individual must behave in a particular way in order to uphold the public image of the group. Rex goes further by arguing that membership of a group exacts a greater price: "Cultural rules always make moral demands upon the individual."<sup>54</sup> Compliance with these rules will decide whether they are adjudged to be a good Muslim, Catholic, American and/or Irish person.

The centrality of culture as a primary focus of identity is underpinned by the notion that the factor which distinguishes one group from another is the existence of differing cultures and therefore cultural groupings. It is these cultures and groupings that form the basis of other associations such as nations and ethnic groups, underpinning and cementing such relationships.<sup>55</sup>

There is much to commend the case for adopting cultural identity as the basis for the current study. Whereas the significance of national identity is profoundly undermined by the centrality of the nation and the problems which this brings for the case of the Irish in Birmingham, the focus on the centrality of culture which underpins discourses relating to cultural identity is somewhat more appealing. Much of the attachment of members of the current research population to notions of identity is anchored in an association with aspects of Irish culture. This is witnessed in the research population's experiences of Irish music, sports, arts, dance and indeed contact with the island of Ireland. However, I do not believe that this offers a full explanation and a sound enough basis upon which to site this research.

Reliance upon notions of cultural identity suffers from the same basic problems as those relating to national identity. Both offer only a partial explanation of the myriad of processes that take place in relation to such individuals, as each focuses on only one aspect of the individual or group's reality, whilst neglecting other dimensions. For example, an interpretation which focuses on the individual's attachment to the nation, automatically dilutes the significance attached to the role of culture and vice versa. Each theory fails to deliver an understanding of identity formation that can fully explain the identities and experiences of the group at the centre of this research.<sup>56</sup>



Taking a lead from Jenkins, I suggest that rather than focusing on an interpretation which concentrates on aspect, one must look to a much broader understanding of identity.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Social Identity***

This broader understanding is most obviously to be found in the form of social identity. As Jenkins correctly posits, social Identity encompasses a vast array of types of identity, including national, cultural and religious modes, thus allowing us to avoid concentration on one narrow interpretation of identity. Indeed, Jenkins uses the terms social identity and identity interchangeably: "All human identities are in some sense – and usually a stronger rather than a weaker sense – social identities."<sup>58</sup>

Social identity theorists argue that the primary influence upon processes of individual identity formation lies in the interaction between the individual and society. Society is made up of a number of distinct social groupings and it is the relationship between these groupings that ultimately shapes the identity of the individual.

Jenkins defines social identity as: "the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities."<sup>59</sup>

Hogg and Abrams identify the principal belief systems that encompass social identity theory, these are 'social mobility' and 'social change'.<sup>60</sup> 'Social mobility' refers to the notion that "boundaries between groups are 'permeable'".<sup>61</sup> Hogg and Abrams move forward this argument:

*"A belief in social mobility simply leads subordinate group members to adopt individualistic strategies to attempt to cast aside their subordinate social identity with its potentially negative connotations and material inferiority in favour of the*

*dominant group's social identity and concomitant material advantage and positive evaluation.*"<sup>62</sup>

Alternatively, 'social change' suggests that the boundaries between groups are essentially fixed: "You are stuck with your potentially negative low-status group membership and can only resort to strategies aimed at improving your group's social status."<sup>63</sup>

In relation to the Irish community in Birmingham there are appeals within both these models, but specifically the notion of 'social mobility'. The Irish as a predominately 'white', English speaking grouping can be deemed to have few problems in 'passing' from the Irish social grouping into the main 'White' grouping within British society.<sup>64</sup>

The types of identity which members of the current research population adopt are undoubtedly essentially social identities, these are constructed as a result of the interaction between the individual and other elements within society and most obviously as result of the interaction between the Irish and British groupings. These relationships impact upon the individual's attempts to derive her/his identity. As Wetherall and Potter argue: "social identity theory claims to develop a truly social psychological account of intergroup relations. An account in which social factors are not incidental or placed on one side but seen as pivotal to psychological formation."<sup>65</sup>

Whilst accepting that social identity theory offers a firm foundation upon which to base this study, I suggest that, in line with Jenkins' assertion that all human identities are Social Identities, we must still determine what particular type of social identity we are talking about. I argue that, having already determined that national and cultural Identity do not provide a complete framework for the study of identity amongst the current research population, we must look elsewhere to ethnicity and ethnic identity.

### ***(1.v) Ethnic Identity as the Central Interpretation of Identity for this Study***

In any discussion of ethnic identity, it is customary to begin by outlining Weber's understanding of the term ethnic group: "We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or birth, or because of memories of colonisation and migration."<sup>66</sup> Weber highlights two fundamental aspects of the nature of ethnic groups. Firstly, a belief in a myth of descent. Secondly, a reference to a notion of similarity.

Roosens considers an ethnic group to be "a form of social organisation in which the participants themselves make use of certain cultural traits from their past, a past which may or may not be verifiable historically."<sup>67</sup>

For Hobsbawm, ethnicity is "almost always connected in some unspecific way with the common origin and descent, from which the common characteristics of the members of an ethnic group are allegedly derived."<sup>68</sup>

Smith also highlights the importance of the notion of common origins but also identifies the significance of a common culture that differentiates the particular group from the remainder of society.<sup>69</sup>

For Roosens, it is not the reality of these similarities but rather the perception of their existence that is significant.<sup>70</sup> Individuals who constitute an ethnic group do so, not because of their common origins or culture, but because of their perception of commonality.

For Cohen, an ethnic grouping is: "a collectivity of people who (a) share some patterns of normative behaviour and (b) form a part of a larger collectivity, interacting with people from other collectivities within the framework of a social system."<sup>71</sup>

Here we see a number of common themes and principles emerging, the notions of the importance of commonality of origin, descent and culture are drawn together to highlight the difference between groups within society.

These selected contributions also demonstrate that ethnic groups are largely constructed on the basis of apparently opposing considerations, those of similarity and difference.<sup>72</sup> Similarity between those within the group and difference from the remainder of society who lie outside.<sup>73</sup>

Academic definitions of ethnic identity have heavily shaped political interpretations of the term. Lord Fraser, speaking in the House of Lords in 1983, outlined what were felt to be crucial to the categorisation of a collectivity as an ethnic group, under the 1976 Race Relations Act. He argues that:

*"it must regard itself and be regarded by others, as a distinct community by virtue of certain characteristics. Some of these characteristics are essential; others not so essential but one or more of them will commonly be found and will help to distinguish the group from the surrounding community. The conditions which appear to me to be essential are these: (1) a long shared history, of which the group is conscious as distinguishing it from other groups, and the memory of which keeps it alive; (2) a cultural tradition of its own, including family and social customs and manners, often but not necessarily associated with religious observance. In addition to those two essential characteristics the following characteristics are... relevant; (3) either a common geographical origin, or descent from a small number of ancestors; (4) a common language, not necessarily peculiar to the group; (5) a common literature peculiar to the group; (6) a common religion different from neighbouring groups or from the general community surrounding it; (7) being a minority or being*

*an oppressed group or dominant group within a larger community, or example a conquered people and their conquerors may both be ethnic groups."*<sup>74</sup>

It is an agglomeration of these various definitions which form my own understanding of ethnicity and ethnic identity for the purposes of this thesis.

Reliance upon an ethnically based interpretation of identity offers a number of clear advantages to a study which seeks to unravel identity and processes of identity formation within the subject population.

Ethnic identity is not tied into the rigidity of other interpretations of identity; rather it allows us to draw upon the national, social and cultural dimensions of an individual's identity, within a much bigger sphere of examination. Ethnic identity, as a form of social identity, allows us to focus on a range of factors, including the influence of the nation-state and culture.

A concentration upon ethnic interpretations of identity allows a much more flexible approach to conceptions of identity. It permits the individual to acknowledge their ethnic origins, in this case Irish, but also to express an attachment to their locality. Thus dividing their loyalties in ways that are not possible in relation to other interpretations of identity. This is crucial to examination of processes of identity formation amongst the current subject population.

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<sup>4</sup> Jenkins, R. Social Identity, 1996, p.4

<sup>5</sup> Smith, A. D. The Ethnic Origins of Nations, 1986, p.22

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<sup>7</sup> Hogg, M. A. & Abrams, D. 1996, p.3

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- <sup>8</sup> Jenkins, R. 1996, p.4
- <sup>9</sup> Hogg, MA & Abrams, D. 1996, p.1, Friedman, J. Cultural Identity and Global Process, 1994, p.131 & p.141
- <sup>10</sup> Friedman, J. 1994, p.141
- <sup>11</sup> Rex, J. 1991, p.6
- <sup>12</sup> See Chapter Three for a discussion of the notion of layers of influence which shape identity.
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- <sup>17</sup> Hall, S. 1993, p.288
- <sup>18</sup> Rex, J. 1991, p.6
- <sup>19</sup> Hall, S. 1993, p.277
- <sup>20</sup> 'Jigs and Realities', The Guardian, 03/06/98, p.8. See Chapter Seven for a further discussion of the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings'
- <sup>21</sup> Lennon, M. et al. 1988 p.215
- <sup>22</sup> This is demonstrated by the fact that ID74 and ID88 have both concealed their Irish heritage at different stages in their lives.
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- <sup>26</sup> Jenkins, R. 1997, p.72
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- <sup>46</sup> Hall, S. 1993, p.297
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## **Chapter Two: Ethnic Identity as Experienced by the Irish Diaspora**

### **(2.i) Introduction**

Having chosen to adopt ethnicity as the form of identity which will be the focus of my research, I now use A. D. Smith's 'Six dimensions of ethnies' to forward that the Irish represent a distinct ethnic group within local society.

I then move on to examine a number of critiques of ethnicity and ethnic identity in order to determine their applicability to the conditions of modern society. I outline and question Gans' twin assertions that ethnicity is in a state of demise, that subsequent generations merely adopt a symbolic attachment to ethnicity and ethnic identity and that this attachment is essentially painless.

This chapter lays the foundation for the remainder of the thesis, allowing for an examination of the key components of the processes, which underpin identity formation in relation to 'Second generation Irish' people in Birmingham.

### **(2.ii) The Irish as a Distinct Ethnic Community or Communities**

The notion of groups having to fulfil a number of criteria in order to be classified as an ethnic group, which I highlighted in Chapter One is also stressed by A.D. Smith, who offers his own criteria for classification.

Smith's 'Six dimensions of ethnies' provides an excellent framework, which can be closely fitted to the case of the divergent individuals which constitute the Irish in Birmingham. The 'Six dimensions of ethnies' are: a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive culture, an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity.<sup>1</sup> These together represent the fundamental components of what constitutes an ethnic group and a suitable yardstick against which to measure the ethnic status and make-up of groups within contemporary

societies. In applying Smith's model to the case of the 'Irish in Birmingham', I acknowledge that any discussion of ethnicity in the context of the island of Ireland must make a distinction between at least two separate ethnic groups. These can, very broadly, be labelled as Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist. In what follows I highlight Smith's definition of each of the dimensions, examining their applicability to the case of both the major traditions that persist in Ireland. At no point do I seek to suggest that the broad grouping of individuals who have themselves left the island of Ireland or trace their ethnic heritage to either Northern Ireland or Republic of Ireland, should be considered a single ethnic grouping. But rather, that these two broad groupings fulfil the criteria which would allow them to articulate their ethnic credentials, should they wish to do so.

### ***(i) A Collective Name***

For Smith, a collective name encapsulates the situation, history and culture of the group in one simple label that is recognisable both to the members and wider society and gives the group a focus for action. Smith states that: "collective names are a sure sign and emblem of ethnic communities, by which they distinguish themselves and summarise their 'essence' to themselves."<sup>2</sup>

This name may contain a reference to the homeland or to the prevailing or historical religious faith of the group, even after the majority of its members have abandoned that faith.<sup>3</sup> The inhabitants of Ireland, its emigrants and the subsequent generations carry with them a distinctive collective name: 'Irish'. This is both self and externally applied by those they encounter in the various societies they inhabit. This term not only delineates who they are and what they represent, but also who and what they are not. In Britain it differentiates them from the British; in the United States it

distinguishes them from other immigrant groups and provides a strong political basis for organisation.

The very existence of the Irish diaspora, the world-wide body of people who trace their origins to the island of Ireland, demonstrates the existence and durability of the Irish collective name. There is a further discussion of diaspora concepts in Chapter Five.

The Irish and their descendants retain the name 'Irish' long after the initial contact with Ireland has gone. Consequently the Irish in the United States are commonly referred to as 'Irish Americans', although many may not have had any direct contact with Ireland for a number of generations.

In relation to the Protestant Irish and the use of the name 'Irish', it is important to make a distinction between those who are from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The reality is that the former may openly embrace the 'Irish' label, whilst the latter may be reluctant to do so because of the political significance which may be attached to it within the context of the Northern Ireland situation. My argument here is not that all individuals from the island of Ireland will use the name 'Irish', but that they have an entitlement to do so. This is signified by the response of one of the interview participants to this study who states of his own Northern Irish Protestant parents: "they both consider themselves to be 'Irish', because they grew up in Ireland... I mean they're from Ireland, all be it Northern Ireland." **(ID109)**

As Chapter Three underlines, I support Jenkins assertion that the process of identification is not a simple one whereby the individual merely labels her/himself according to their perceptions of their own identity, status and needs, but rather it is a far more complicated two-way negotiation in which the individual and group are also labelled externally by wider society.<sup>4</sup> For example, in war-time Germany, the external labelling of the Jewish community by the authorities was of profoundly more

significance than the community's own perceptions of Jewish identity. Similarly, the Protestant population of Northern Ireland has traditionally labelled itself as 'British' but, when in England, individuals have often found themselves being referred to as 'Irish'.<sup>5</sup>

The collective name serves as a badge of location for the community, it: "summons up images of the distinctive traits and characteristics of a community in the minds and imaginations of its participants and outsiders."<sup>6</sup> In the Irish case, it unites those who were born in Ireland with those who were born in the wider Irish diaspora and connects them inextricably with the island of Ireland.

### ***(ii) A Common Myth of Descent***

In much the same way as the collective name provides the essence of the identity of the group, the myth of descent defines two crucial elements; the historical roots of the group and its position in contemporary society. It explains its "origins, growth and destiny".<sup>7</sup> These myths convey a message of commonality with those who are defined as the group's ancestors and these links are celebrated in the history, folklore and culture of the group, which are passed from generation to generation. In Smith's words: "They are myths of spatial and temporal origins, of migration, of ancestry and filiation, of the golden age, of decline and exile and rebirth."<sup>8</sup>

In applying Smith's considerations of a myth of descent to the 'Irish' case, it is more accurate to speak of myths of descent. The major traditions within contemporary Ireland can trace their roots to a number of distinct sources; these are frequently guided by present political and religious affiliations. The existence of a number of groups with different origins reflects the nature of present-day social, political and religious divisions within the island of Ireland. Each group traces its roots back to a specific point in Irish history and the arrival of a particular group of people to the

island of Ireland. The Catholic/Nationalist/Republican population traces its origins to the arrival of the Celts and Gaels and the fusion of these strands into a coherent cultural form to explain their passage through time.

The Protestant communities, which form the majority population in Northern Ireland and a significant minority community in the Republic of Ireland, look to a number of different points of origin, which reflect the different histories of these groupings. Some look to the same Gaelic Celtic ancestry as other 'Irish' people, others back further to overland travellers from Scotland in the wake of the Ice Age and others to those who settled in Ireland as part of the Plantations of Ulster and to a lesser degree of Munster.<sup>9</sup>

The ability to trace one's origins to a specific grouping and a particular time period serves as a justification of one's position and a legitimization of contemporary political and religious actions, including attitudes towards other groups within the island. The past is constantly used to legitimise the present:

*"As they emerge from the collective experiences of successive generations, the myths coalesce and are edited into chronicles, epics and ballads which combine cognitive maps of the community's history and situation with poetic metaphors of its sense of dignity and identity."<sup>10</sup>*

### ***(iii) A Shared History***

History provides the link between the past and the present, providing the group with a sense of solidarity with their ancestors. As Smith states:

*"A sense of history unites successive generations each with its set of experiences which are added to the common stock, and it also defines a population in terms of*

*temporal sequences, which conveys to later generations the historicity of their experiences.*"<sup>11</sup>

As I argue in Chapter Six, Ireland and the Irish have a long and intricate history which can be traced back to long before the twelfth century Norman intervention. It is this experience which is evoked as the common histories of the different traditions in Ireland. Once again I stress the plurality of experience in Ireland and notion of histories, rather than a single history of the inhabitants of Ireland. The distinctive culture of the Celts, their language, art and literature which, when combined with Christianity, provides the backbone of the common history of the Celtic-Irish.<sup>12</sup> The Protestant populations of Ireland have similarly constructed a common history that highlights and glorifies the actions of their ancestors.

The existence of a common history or histories is crucial to the persistence of the predominant forces in Irish political life over the last two hundred years or more, supplementing the common myths of each brand of political doctrine. The tales of the past serve to fuel the actions of the present.

The Irish Catholic/Nationalist/Republican population has repeatedly invoked the memories of historical figures who represent the struggle to free Ireland from the yoke of English/British rule and preserve a notion of Irishness over a period of eight hundred years. Figures such as Wolfe Tone and the 'martyrs' of the 1916 Uprising are repeatedly recalled in order to underpin or justify more recent actions.

Similarly, Protestants/Unionists/Loyalists look to the actions of those who have sought to retain Ireland's links with England and later with Britain and to constrain the threat of Irish Nationalism, Republicanism and Catholicism. Individuals such as William of Orange who defeated the armies of Catholic King James in 1689 and the Apprentice Boys who saved the city of Londonderry for the approaching William by

closing its gates in the face of James' Catholic army, are hailed as the heroes of Protestant Ireland, while those such as Captain Lundy who had been prepared to surrender to the King's army, are held up as traitors and enemies of the Protestant faith.<sup>13</sup> The common history of the Protestants/Unionists/Loyalists is one which is constructed around the defence of Protestantism in the face of Catholicism and more latterly in the preservation of the Union with Britain.

The Irish, of both political and religious traditions, undoubtedly adhere to a common history which legitimises both their historical roots and their contemporary political actions. This is most vividly reflected in the annual commemorations of historical events by both sides, usually in the form of highly politicised marches to celebrate the Battle of the Boyne or the Easter Uprising of 1916.

#### ***(iv) A Distinctive Shared Culture***

The existence of a distinctive culture is both inclusive and exclusive in that it brings together, involves and consumes those who perceive themselves to share the same cultural values, traits and interests whilst excluding those who are outside, alien and members of other groups. The distinctive nature of the group's culture marks it out from other groups in society and distinguishes it in a way which makes it synonymous with the collective name and the land of origin. As Smith states: "members of the ethnies are similar and alike in those cultural traits which they are dissimilar from non-members."<sup>14</sup> Smith lists a series of traits which may set the group apart, these include language, religion, dress, food, music and arts. If one takes just a number of these traits, one can see that the 'Irish' of each hue possess a culture which is distinguishable from those of their nearest neighbours, the English, Scots, Welsh and French. In terms of religion, Irish Roman Catholics have

historically been portrayed as different, with their failure to embrace the Protestant faith singling them out as being foolish, superstitious and deviant.<sup>15</sup>

The existence of a distinctive Irish culture in contemporary Britain can be witnessed in a simple glance at one of the Irish community newspapers, which contain listings for indigenous Irish sports such as Gaelic football, Hurling and Camogie and activities such as Irish dancing, language classes, music and literary groups. Each of these reflects a different aspect of Irish culture, which draws upon the cultural heritage of the group and expresses sentiments which are peculiar to Ireland and the Irish. As Smith states: "the greater the number of differentiating cultural ties and/or unique cultural traits, the more intense the sense of separate ethnicity, and the greater the chances of ethnic persistence."<sup>16</sup>

#### ***(v) An Association with a specific territory***

Smith highlights three distinct types of association the first being 'sacred centres', often of a religious nature such as Mecca. Secondly, 'commemorative association', invariably between the land and the people. Finally, 'external recognition', the act of looking back over one's shoulder in recognition of one's origins and roots.<sup>17</sup>

I argue that the Irish experience a 'commemorative association' as the Irish in the diaspora recall and celebrate their links with the Island of Ireland. This is equally applicable to both of the main traditions, with both the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities attaching particular significance to different parts of the landmass of Ireland. This is perhaps most demonstrable in the functioning of Irish communities throughout the diaspora, which celebrate Ireland and their Irishness at every available opportunity. They recall the land, people and culture which they have simultaneously left behind and carried with them.<sup>18</sup> Irish



cultural centres are adorned with innumerable maps of Ireland, paintings of Irish scenes and other reminders of Ireland and Irish culture.

This association is also witnessed in the literature and theatre which is produced by and available to Irish communities in Britain.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Irish dancehalls echo to sounds of Irish ballads which make reference to Irish place names and historical events and serve to reaffirm the individuals' sense of association with Ireland.

There is also a significant emphasis placed upon attachment to one's local area, this is reflected in the relative importance of the various County Associations, which organise activities that focus on the home county. These include charity events and visits from local politicians and personalities. Such associations allow the individual to retain links with their locality in Ireland.

#### ***(vi) A Sense of Solidarity***

The sense of solidarity which exists amongst Irish people can be seen at a number of levels within Irish communities in Britain and elsewhere. Firstly, there is the tradition whereby emigrants initially come over to live with family members and friends who have previously settled in Britain.<sup>20</sup> This allows the individual to develop social networks amongst other Irish people and become involved in the life of the wider community, living and socialising with individuals with common experiences. The Irish, like many other migrant groups, appear to find it much easier to interact with other Irish people, particularly in the earliest months of their stay.<sup>21</sup> This serves as a bridge between Irish and British societies, which does not necessitate the individual immediately plunging her/himself into a wholly alien environment.

The degree of solidarity is further stressed by the tendency of the Irish to group themselves together into communities, be it for the purposes of housing, socialising or leisure activities. This can be seen in the existence of so-called Irish areas in

English towns and cities, Kilburn and Finsbury Park in London and Erdington and Kings Heath in Birmingham.

For Smith, a sense of solidarity represents a bond that could potentially override all other forms of social affiliations.<sup>22</sup> To this end, a pride in being Irish appears to overcome a number of other socio-cultural and economic factors to create an apparent 'oneness' amongst Irish people. This is borne out in the success of groups such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) which brings Irish people together and provides a link between Ireland, in which the GAA plays a considerable role within local communities and the new environment.

Smith's 'Six dimensions of ethnies' demonstrate that the Irish in England represent a distinct ethnic grouping. The Irish, of the different hues, fulfil the criteria laid down by Smith to distinguish them from other ethnic groups within British society. In making this assertion, I acknowledge that individuals from the different traditions have different interpretations of what 'Irishness' is and what this Irish community looks like.

To qualify this argument I suggest that within constructions of Irishness in Birmingham, it is the Irishness of Roman Catholic/Nationalist/Republican Ireland, which has been to the fore. This is not to suggest that all individuals who identify as Irish in England are from these traditions. Rather that there has been an absence of a discernible Irish Protestant presence and accompanying distinct identity. This has not been the case elsewhere in Britain, most notably in Scotland and the Northwest of England.<sup>23</sup> When considering Smith's 'Six dimensions of ethnies' in relation to the case of the Irish in Birmingham, it is always important to constantly retain the notion of different cultures, different histories and different ways of being Irish.

The Irish community in Birmingham is a broad loose collective of individuals, whose heritage links them to the island of Ireland. I do not suggest that all individuals who

were born on the island of Ireland or are the children or grandchildren of emigrants from Ireland will see themselves as being part of this community, merely that they have the right to define themselves among its constituents.

Having previously isolated ethnic identity as the most appropriate interpretation of identity for the purposes of this thesis and subsequently established the ethnic credentials of the Irish in Birmingham, it is now important to probe more closely a number of principle debates regarding the significance of ethnicity as a marker of identity. Central amongst these are those which question the applicability and durability of ethnicity and ethnic based interpretations of identity.

### ***(2.iii) Academic debates regarding Ethnicity***

In recent decades there have been vigorous academic debates as to the nature and origins of ethnicity and ethnic identity. These debates have led to a serious questioning of the significance and validity of ethnicity as an analytical tool.

One of the principal debates has been conducted between the primordialist and instrumentalist camps.<sup>24</sup> Primordialists argue that the origins of ethnicity can be traced back through history and is rooted in what Smith terms the 'primordial' ties of race, ancestry, religion, language and territory.<sup>25</sup> Counter to this, instrumentalists argue that ethnic groups are a response to a number of forces within modern societies, highlighting the 'instrumental' and 'situational' nature of ethnicity, which is the subject of constant pressures and changes. The former stresses the permanence of ethnic communities whilst the latter highlights the adaptability of groups to individual situations.<sup>26</sup> This crude analysis offers an insight into what remain the two principle schools of thought within this area. Personally, I tend towards the 'instrumentalist' view, for I believe that ethnic identity is profoundly situational in

nature and is subject to an immense degree of adaptability according to prevailing conditions.<sup>27</sup>

Yancey highlights the twin approaches that have dominated American debates regarding ethnicity, these are the Pluralist and Assimilationist approaches.<sup>28</sup> The Pluralist approach specifies that a multiplicity of ethnic groups can exist within any society and can continue to exist despite their contact with each other. By contrast, the assimilationist approach dictates that minority ethnic groupings will, over a period of generations, assimilate into the dominant ethnic grouping: "cultural differences between national origin groups pass through later generations in progressively diluted forms and ultimately disappear in modern society."<sup>29</sup> This debate is particularly appropriate for the Irish in Birmingham, because of its position as a 'White' migrant grouping and the assumed ease of assimilation.

### ***Ethnicity and Class***

A number of authors have also questioned the significance and durability of ethnicity because of its relationship to class.<sup>30</sup> Hall states that: "The reliance of much of academia upon ethnicity has largely been fuelled by the absence of a single overarching identity such as class, which can combine all other identities."<sup>31</sup> This is supported by Wilpert who argues that ethnicity has come to the fore because of the "weakening of class-based categories as a source of collective identity and political mobilization."<sup>32</sup>

Those that have sought to defend the role of class as an analytical tool argue that ethnicity is merely a poor substitute for class, or at the very least a constituent of class. Gans states that: "much of the contemporary behaviour described as ethnic strikes me as working class behaviour, which differs only slightly among various

ethnic groups.” He concludes that “In other words, ethnicity is a working class style.”<sup>33</sup>

Roosens has countered such notions by arguing that ethnicity won through in its own right and not merely because of the failure of class based identity systems: “ethnic division is horizontal, and it creates equivalencies rather than hierarchies.”<sup>34</sup>

Whilst acknowledging the commonality of experiences amongst individuals from different ethnic communities, yet the same social class grouping, I would temper this by arguing that the experience of being a working class Pakistani Muslim Woman and a working class Irish woman will be dramatically different. These experiences will be heavily influenced by ethnic, cultural, religious and social norms, conventions and practices of the ethnic group. Social class is largely a label ascribed to an individual through the processes of social categorisation within wider society. By contrast, ethnic affiliation is more likely to be ascribed through the individual’s own identification with the group. This means that the individual is more likely to adopt an ethnically based label, rather than one denoting social class, because this will have a greater degree of day-to-day significance and personal meaning.

Class is not the only basis for questioning the significance of ethnicity.

### ***Globalisation***

The debate regarding the significance of globalisation has prompted a further re-evaluation of notions of ethnicity and ethnic identity. Hall states of globalisation: “As national cultures become more exposed to outside influences it is difficult to preserve cultural identities intact, or to prevent them from becoming weakened through cultural bombardment and infiltration.”<sup>35</sup>

The processes associated with globalisation and the Americanisation of so much of the world’s cultures mean that individuals from America to Asia and Australia to

Africa wear the same clothes, eat the same food and have access to the same communication networks. This inevitably has consequences for the maintenance of national and ethnic cultures and identities.<sup>36</sup>

The processes of globalisation mean: "the old identities which stabilized the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject."<sup>37</sup> The result: "the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity."<sup>38</sup>

O' Toole argues that the onset of modernity is particularly problematic for a nation such as Ireland, for, as he states in relation to the work of Paul Durcan: "He writes out of a society that has become post-modern without ever really becoming modern."<sup>39</sup>

In Hall's eyes, globalisation appears to be: "producing a variety of possibilities and new positions of identification, and making identities more positional, more political, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified or trans-historical."<sup>40</sup>

Foremost amongst these is the notion of multiple identities, the process whereby an individual adopts a multiplicity of labels in order to reflect different aspects of her/his heritage. For the subject population, this may take the form of 'Irish-Briton' or as I suggest elsewhere, more likely, 'Birmingham-Irish', 'Brummie Irish' or 'Irish-descent'. I develop the discussion of multiple identities at a later point in this chapter.

Hall asks is: "the centring of marginality really *the* representative post-modern experience?"<sup>41</sup> Could this be an explanation of the revived interest in Irish identity amongst the children of those migrants who were born in Ireland? Do such individuals adopt a form of Irish identity because they perceive it to be somehow 'fashionable' to be marginalised and that this represents their safest route into marginalisation? Or is it merely, as I would argue, that these identities have always existed, it is simply that the individuals concerned now feel comfortable enough to

act out these identities in the public domain. For previous generations, these opportunities were restricted to community based and Irish-friendly settings. Consequently, globalisation may have assisted such individuals by making the type of identities that they would adopt available and more acceptable.<sup>42</sup> This discussion is developed at a later point in this chapter.

### ***Gans' Critique of Ethnicity***

Despite the best efforts of a number of post-modernist thinkers, the most fervent critique of ethnicity has come from those, such as Gans, who have heralded the imminent demise of ethnicity. Gans argues that ethnicity is being undermined by the passing of each generation.<sup>43</sup> Gans, responding to widespread academic claims of an ethnic revival in the United States, argues that this revival is largely a phenomenon lacking real substance. He argues that the twin processes of assimilation and acculturation that immigrants and subsequent generations experience in America mean that by the third generation they have largely been subsumed into the wider population. By this stage the descendants are likely to have left ethnic neighbourhoods of their forebears, strayed from meaningful cultural participation, married outside the ethnic grouping, abandoned the traditional religious faith and experienced greater exposure to American society.<sup>44</sup> As Gans suggests, by the third generation:

*"people are less and less interested in their ethnic cultures and organisations – both sacred and secular – and are instead more concerned with maintaining their ethnic identity, with the feeling of being Jewish, or Italian, or Polish, and with finding ways of feeling and expressing that identity in suitable ways."*<sup>45</sup>

Gans argues that by this juncture:

*"ethnics do not need either ethnic cultures or organizations; instead, they resort to the use of ethnic symbols. As a result, ethnicity may be turning into symbolic ethnicity, an ethnicity of last resort, which could nevertheless persist for generations."*<sup>46</sup>

Consequently, the 'Third generation' chooses those aspects of the ethnic culture, which do not involve a cost, at times that are convenient to themselves. He records: "most people look for easy and intermittent ways of expressing their identity, for ways that do not conflict with other ways of life."<sup>47</sup> This means that: "ethnicity takes on an expressive rather than instrumental function in people's lives, becoming more of a leisure-time activity".<sup>48</sup>

Gans paraphrasing Hansen, states that "acculturation and assimilation are temporary processes, because the third generation could afford to remember an ancestral culture which the traumatic Americanization forced the immigrant and second generations to forget."<sup>49</sup>

This has implications, not only for the individual, but also for the ethnic culture itself, as ethnic symbols "are 'abstracted' from that culture and pulled out of its original moorings, so to speak, to become stand-ins for it."<sup>50</sup> The other perceived consequence is that such a notion of ethnic allegiance: "does not require functioning groups or networks".<sup>51</sup> There is, to quote Bakalian, a shift: "from being to feeling Armenian".<sup>52</sup> Cultural practices have been shed, but not the sense of identity and sense of distinctiveness.<sup>53</sup>



Gans deduces that the move toward 'Symbolic Ethnicity' has signalled a change in the types of ethnic association embraced by individuals in modern society; a move toward: "ethnic aggregates rather than groups".<sup>54</sup>

Gans goes further by suggesting that some of his academic colleagues may be guilty of ethnic opportunism; of embracing and forwarding notions of ethnicity and ethnic identity for their own benefit: "Some have re-embraced their ethnicity solely to spur their careers".<sup>55</sup>

Roosens extends this notion of opportunism to members of wider society by suggesting that people may change their ethnic identity only if they can profit by doing so.<sup>56</sup> If one acknowledges that individuals have the ability and opportunity to buy in and out of a range of identities at different points in their lives, then it is inevitable that some individuals will buy in at those points when they deem it safe to do so.

#### ***(2.iv) Gansian Critiques and the Subject Population***

As I argue in Chapter Seven, Birmingham, in the period since 1974, was an extremely problematic place in which to be Irish. Pervading anti-Irish sentiments within the city meant that far from being beneficial to embrace one's Irishness, it was, in many instances, detrimental to the individual's social standing, employment opportunities and even personal safety to proclaim one's Irishness. The accounts offered by participants in this research demonstrate the pain to be exacted from identifying as 'Irish'.

In response to Gans' suggestion of 'opportunism', I argue that, in light of such experiences, it would be somewhat disingenuous to suggest that such individuals are 'buying in', in order to reap the benefits of 'trendy' Irishness. If one is prepared to

acknowledge the benefits of ethnic identification, as Gans and Roosens have done, one must also acknowledge the potential cost of such identification. Whilst acknowledging that a considerable number of people are perceived to embrace a sense of Irish identity once a year on St Patrick's Day, as their only public display of Irishness, this does not mean that they are not Irish, for there are innumerable ways of 'being Irish'. 'Irishness' is not the preserve of those who participate in Irish cultural activities or frequent Irish centres.

Whilst one might have an issue with the notion of individuals buying into and out of an identity at opportune or inopportune times, I consider it to be a human instinct to avoid confrontation, wherever possible means that this is the reality. This is not about individuals 'buying in' for St Patrick's Day and 'baling out' the following day. This is about individuals attempting to avoid the sort of abuse that their parents experienced, this does not lessen their Irishness, for there cannot be many Irish people, of whatever generation, who would choose to endure criticism purely to prove their Irish ethnic credentials.

Many of those who arrived in Birmingham in the post-war period experienced discrimination because of their ethnic origins, accents and historically, as Hickman has argued, their Catholicism.<sup>57</sup> For their children and grandchildren, accents are not a concern, they invariably sound like their non-Irish peers.<sup>58</sup> In reality, they can pick and choose when to reveal their Irishness, an option rarely open to the previous generation. They may choose to identify their Irishness, only when the circumstances are comfortable to do so. Similarly their accents may mean that when they speak on the subject of Northern Ireland, they may be assumed, by many people, to be impartial commentators (if there is such a thing), rather than as Irish women or men. In essence their greatest problem may be being accepted as an 'Irish' person.

Whilst a Gansian approach to identity amongst the subject population may suggest that there are not the same level of problems associated with identifying as Irish as those experienced by previous generations. This however does not mean that there are no costs associated with such identification. Whilst the price for their parents lay in discrimination on the basis of their accents, for their children the social and psychological price arguably lies in the attitudes of others to their identity.

As the fieldwork findings indicate, this questioning and even outright criticism takes many different forms and may represent a many pronged attack.<sup>59</sup> This questioning emanates from elements within British society, in Ireland and from within their own Irish communities. The nature of this questioning must surely serve to dispel Gan's notion of 'Symbolic' and pain-free identification. I argue that the real price is paid by those who attempt to adopt a form of Irish identity. The negative experiences of this grouping merely underlines the fact that ethnicity and ethnic identity are alive and well and are perceived to be important to both the individuals concerned and those who question them.

### ***(2.v) Ethnic Identity and the significance of Multiple Identities***

Yancey asserts that despite the arguments of those who herald its demise:

*"it is clear that ethnicity is not dead but much alive today, although it is something very different than the way it has usually been presented. Rather than a constant ascribed trait that is inherited from the past, ethnicity is the result of a process that continues to unfold. It is basically a manifestation of the way populations are organised in terms of interaction patterns, institutions, personal values, attitudes, lifestyles and presumed consciousness of kind. The assumption of a common heritage as the essential aspect of ethnicity is erroneous."*<sup>60</sup>

Yancey underscores two points that are particularly salient to the study of ethnic identity. The first relates to 'internal' and 'external' group relations within modern society; these are dealt with in Chapter Three. The second suggests that we need to look beyond traditional interpretations of identity to notions that reflect conditions and situations within modern society. This together with a number of strands that are explored in this chapter leads us to the central hypotheses which lies at the core of this thesis: that Multiple Identities play a central role in the experiences of the subject population. The different interpretations of identity, which I explored in this and previous chapters, Gans' work on 'Symbolic Ethnicity', the debates regarding globalisation and the notion of individuals playing to different audiences, all underscore this centrality.

Traditionally, identity has traditionally been viewed as being constructed around fixed core identities, based upon single aspects of the individual's experience. Nationality, gender, sexual orientation and social class have all acted as a core identity, with fixed notions of what it means to occupy these roles.

I argue that the advent of Globalisation necessitates the expansion of the number of facets of identity from which individuals can compose their identity. Individuals are no longer restricted to one single fixed notion of identity, but rather they seek to combine a number of aspects of their reality as part of a multiple form of identity. This may reflect considerations of ethnic, national, cultural, historical, locality, gender, class and sexual orientation. Rather than seeing themselves as 'Irish' or 'British', an individual may see her/himself as a 'working class Irish Brummie' or a 'disabled Mancunian Irish woman'.

The conceptualisation of the Irish Diaspora and the acknowledgement of its relationship to Irish society has dramatically re-drawn boundaries between the

migrant and successive generations and the point of origin. This necessitates a re-appraisal of who are and who are not constituents of the Irish Diaspora.

It is no longer the case that all Irish people are to be found living on the island of Ireland, as it may appear to many of those who have remained in Ireland. For millions of individuals, the reality is that of living on a permanent or semi-permanent basis in Britain, the United States and elsewhere. It is inevitable that such individuals adapt their lifestyles and ultimately their identities to reflect these circumstances. This has particular consequences for those who are born in these societies with parent(s) who were born in 'Ireland'. For Irish people in the United States (USA) and Australia, there has been a tendency to combine their Irish heritage and USA or Australian residence to produce a new identity, that of 'Irish-American' or 'Aussie-Irish' or 'Australian-Irish'. Individuals have effectively combined two national labels to produce strong and coherent new identities. The role of the diaspora is probed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

For the Irish in Britain, this situation has not been allowed to develop, because of a number of historical and political factors. The consequence is that there is currently no label that successfully or coherently combines British and Irish national elements.<sup>61</sup> The term 'British' has particularly negative connotations for many Irish people, because of the Anglo-Irish historical relationship and the situation in Northern Ireland.

These factors, together with the specific situation in Birmingham in the period since 1974, have conspired to produce a context in which some Irish people have found it difficult to embrace an identity, which incorporates a British national element. Instead, many of these individuals have sought to adopt an identity that combines a sense of Irishness with an acknowledgement of their attachment to their locality, be it 'nominal' or 'virtual', geographical or emotional.

This combination serves a number of purposes. Firstly, attachment to a local British identity, reference to being 'Irish descent' or even to England deflects any awkward incorporation of a British national label, yet reflects their dual affinities. I believe that such multiple forms of identity are not only possible, but are a reality for thousands of Irish people in Birmingham and elsewhere in the diaspora. I also argue that these are equally as valid as an identity that revolves exclusively around a sense of one's Irishness. This means that these are innumerable varieties of Irishness and accompanying ways of being 'Irish'. These reflect not only one's national origins and locality but also one's age, gender, social class, sexual orientation and social location. Consequently, no grouping, either within or outside the island of Ireland, has exclusive claim to the label 'Irish' and therefore no single type of Irish identity should be seen to be more valid than any other. This particularly applies to the divisions between those who were born in 'Ireland' and those who were born in Britain.

The dynamics of the Irish community in Birmingham and the recent situation in the city means that one cannot simply speak of a single type of Irish ethnic identity. Instead, one must examine a number of differing interpretations of Irish identity.

Multiple identities allow individuals to reflect both their heritage and attachment to their local town or city and to balance the competing demands made upon them. As one fieldwork respondent states: "English, because I have an English father... the Irish because I've got an Irish mother and the Brummie one because I am from Birmingham. A culmination of the three." **(ID16)**

The adoption of multiple identities reflects the emergence of a truly multi-ethnic society. I believe that a key to understanding such societies is provided by Barth's work in relation to 'Ethnic Boundaries'.<sup>62</sup> This reflects the relationship between groups within modern societies and in particular the very ways in which individuals align themselves on the basis of perceived ethnic differences. It is in examining the

boundaries between different groups that we can begin to explore the deeper issues of identity. These boundaries represent the uncertain lines that divide one ethnic group from another, for example, Irish from British. Barth states that these boundaries represent the blurred lines between groups and that at these edges individuals can move from one group to another. This, however does not lead to the collapse of the group identity, for as Barth acknowledges: "it is clear that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them".<sup>63</sup>

Barth's notion of the existence of 'ethnic boundaries' between groups within society, across which individuals move back and forth, is particularly apt to the case of the Irish in Birmingham. Within the context of post-1974 hostility, it became extremely problematic to be Irish and as the fieldwork results demonstrate, a significant number of individuals are likely to have chosen to play down their Irishness and Irish origins, thus moving across the 'ethnic boundaries' between the Irish and British sections of society. This may have taken many forms, from the toning down of accents by those who were born in Ireland, to the conscious non-acknowledgement of their Irish heritage amongst those who were born in Birmingham. For many individuals active in the realms of local politics, commerce and culture, there was little to be gained by publicly articulating an Irish identity within local society. Prevailing conditions in the city are likely to mean that many members of the Irish community in Birmingham have spent a significant part of their lives moving back and forth across this ethnic boundary, according to the different situations in which they found themselves.

It should be noted that the public re-emergence of the local Irish community during the 1980s and 1990s, demonstrated by the rapid progress of the Birmingham Irish Community Forum and phenomenal success of the St Patrick's Day Parade, hastened the movement back across the ethnic boundary between Irish and British groups.

The experiences of the subject population are inexplicably bound up in their wider relationships with different elements within local and wider society. It is on this relationship that I now concentrate.

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- <sup>49</sup> Hansen, M. The Problems of the Third Generation Immigrant, 1938 in Gans, H. J. 1979, p.4
- <sup>50</sup> Gans, H. J. 1979, p.9
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- <sup>57</sup> Hickman, M. Religion, Class and Identity, Research in Ethnic Relations Series, 1995, Holmes, C. John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society 1871-1971, p.57
- <sup>58</sup> Harrison, P. 1982, p.76
- <sup>59</sup> See Chapter Five for a further discussion of the questioning that members of the subject population experience and Chapter Six for an examination of notions of Duality.
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## ***Chapter Three: Identity Formation - 'Internal Definition' and 'External Definition'***

### ***(3.1) Introduction***

This chapter focuses on a number of the processes which underpin identity formation. In particular it considers the relationship between the individual's perception of their own identity and those of other elements within society. At the heart of this analysis is Jenkins' suggestion that: "Individual identity is located within a two-way process, an interaction of 'ego' and 'other', inside and outside. It is in the meeting of internal and external definition that identity, whether collective or individual, is created."<sup>1</sup> This also draws heavily upon the work of Erikson and Hutnik. In exploring the influence of 'external' modes of definition, I focus on two principle spheres of influence, social categorisation and the role of groups within identity formation processes. I then explore these twin phenomena within the lifelong processes of socialisation, as experienced by the current research population.

### ***(3.ii) 'Self-definition'/'Internal Definition'***

Academic examinations of internal influences upon processes of identification heavily concentrate upon the concept of Self-identification.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation implies that the individual's identity is primarily determined by the individual's own notions of who they are. Individuals seek to place themselves within existing patterns of behaviour, in relation to the identities of those around them and according to their perception of their history, culture and heritage.<sup>3</sup>

Jenkins argues that individuals: "signal to in- or out-group members a self-definition of their nature or identity."<sup>4</sup> The individual and/or group, by virtue of the use of cultural symbols, language, behaviour and mannerisms, send messages to fellow

group members and wider society that they belong to a particular grouping. Individuals internalise their experiences and the actions and attitudes of others to produce their own interpretations of their identity and of who and what they are. Most obviously, individuals and groups identify themselves by a label, or sets of labels that they adopt to describe themselves, for example, 'British' or 'Irish', 'Catholic' or 'Protestant', 'Male' or 'Female'. It is an interest in this primary self-definition that lies at the core of this thesis. The labels that individuals adopt represent the veneer of their identity, but it is in uncovering the social, political and cultural significance that individuals place upon these labels, that their true value lies in relation to their identity.

Hutnik offers a model of self-definition containing four potential self-identification strategies to be adopted by individuals, which I argue can assist us in exploring the identity of the current research population.<sup>5</sup> These are the 'disassociative' strategy whereby the individual categorises her/himself according to ethnic group membership, thus disassociating themselves from the majority group identity. The 'assimilative' strategy, which refers to identification with the majority group identity and denial of ethnic origin. The 'acculturative' strategy, whereby the individual is categorised equally in terms of majority and minority identities. Finally, the marginal strategy in which the individual chooses to disregard majority and minority ethnic categories in favour of an alternative social identity.<sup>6</sup> Hutnik's model offers an interesting approach to the question of self-identification, which can easily be applied to the case of the Irish in Birmingham. The nature of the experience of the research population in Birmingham means that there are, as the findings of the fieldwork stress, individuals who conform to each of these approaches. Participants include individuals who, despite their common heritage and similar life experiences, identify as 'English' or 'British' only, others who state that they are solely 'Irish', a

considerable number who combine aspects of their Irish and British heritage and a smaller proportion who reject all associated modes of identification. This is explored in greater depth in the fieldwork analysis.

Explorations of the significance of self-identification for processes of identity formation underline a number of key points. Primarily, that individuals make sense of an array of phenomena, including heritage, culture and personal relationships in order to position themselves within society and to embrace particular identities and labels of identity.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of theories of self-identification within identity formation processes, it would be wrong to concentrate too heavily on self-identification.<sup>7</sup> For, as Jenkins argues, academic and political thinking in relation to identity tends to disproportionately focus on the way in which groups and individuals view themselves and the labels and identities that they assign themselves. Such an approach fails to acknowledge that no individual is able to construct her/his identity in isolation from the remainder of society. All processes related to identity formation are conducted through sustained interaction with society.<sup>8</sup> Jenkins states that these processes: "presuppose both an audience, without whom they make no sense, and an externally derived framework of meaning."<sup>9</sup> Identity formation is necessarily 'transactional': it is always a negotiation with society, at a personal and a group level.<sup>10</sup>

This is not to suggest that self-identification does not play a fundamental role in the processes of identity formulation, but rather it must be viewed within a much bigger framework of analysis. Crucial to this framework is consideration of the role of external influences in shaping personal identity.

### ***(3.iii) External Definition***

Whilst it is an interest in the self-identifications of members of the subject population which lies at the heart of this thesis, this is augmented by a desire to uncover the role played by the external influences in shaping the individual's self-perception of their identity. In exploring the role of external categorisation of individuals in relation to processes of identity formation, I concentrate on two central phenomena, social categorisation and the role of groups, before exploring their significance for the processes of socialisation.

#### ***'Social Categorisation'***

One of the primary ways in which external influences help to shape an individual's identity is through processes of 'Social Categorisation': the ways in which an individual or group is labelled, stereotyped or categorised within wider society.

I have already asserted that the processes of identification do not occur in isolation.

The individual, in addition to labelling her/himself, is also labelled externally by other elements within wider society. This categorisation may take a number of forms which impact most earnestly upon processes of individual identity formation.

It is important to note that the individual is socially categorised both internally by her/his own group and by members of wider society. Further to this, it is useful to distinguish between what can loosely be termed positive and negative categorisation.

If a group is positively categorised within wider society, then an individual is likely to grow up with a positive reinforcement of their identity. (S)he is likely to experience less external questioning of her/his identity, thus allowing her/him to develop and evolve their identity within a positive atmosphere, without fear of criticism, stereotyping and verbal or physical attack.

Where the group is negatively categorised, this in-turn potentially impacts upon the way in which the individual develops her/his personal identity. The individual may opt, consciously or subconsciously, to alter the way in which (s)he behaves and the ways in which (s)he express her/his identity. As previously highlighted, the social and political situation in Birmingham in the 1970s and 1980s can be deemed to have had a profound effect upon a section of the research population, with some individuals being deterred from embracing an Irish identity as a result of the negative perceptions and categorisations of the community by wider society. For individuals experiencing 'crises of identity' and a dilemma over whether to express an Irish identity, this may lead to the rejection of an Irish dimension. Faced with a stark choice between adopting an identity that is likely to incite hostility, against one that is universally accepted, a considerable number of such individuals are likely to choose the easier option. This is discussed further in the fieldwork findings.<sup>11</sup>

An aspect of Social Categorisation which is frequently overlooked, is that we, as individuals, are not only categorised by elements of wider society, but we also categorise others.<sup>12</sup> This occurs in two main ways. Firstly, we actively attempt to locate individuals and attribute identities to 'others' as a result of perceived characteristics and behaviour patterns. Secondly, we situate others in society in order to position ourselves. As Jenkins states: "To put Others in their place is necessarily to claim a place for ourselves (and vice versa)."<sup>13</sup> Within both these accounts, the notions of 'Self' and the 'Other' play a key role. The 'Other' is used as a barometer against which to judge oneself: one decides who or what one is in comparison to the 'Other'. It is through the ability to place others that not only allows us to establish our identity, but also to maintain the distinction between 'Us' and 'Them':

*"To claim an ethnic identity (or to attempt to assign one to someone else) is to distinguish ourselves from others; it is to draw a boundary between 'us' and 'them' on the basis of the claims we make about ourselves and them, that 'we' share something that 'they' do not."*<sup>14</sup>

Categorisation is thus a two-way process.<sup>15</sup> Just as others categorise us, so we categorise others within society and in defining who those individuals are, we consequently define our own identity.

By labelling others we send out as many messages about ourselves and our own social groups as we do about those that we seek to categorise. It is in reference to ourselves that we define the positions that others will occupy.<sup>16</sup> As Hogg and Abrams state:

*"People tend to classify others on the basis of their similarities and differences to self; they constantly perceive others as members of the same category as self (in-group members) or as members of a different category to self (outgroup members)."*<sup>17</sup>

Having primarily concentrated on the role of the individual, I now return to consider the role of groups in relation to processes of identity formation.

### ***Role of Groups***

As we saw in Chapter One, groups play a fundamental role within modern society. Individuals are, by virtue of their ethnic, cultural and social associations, members of a number of different groups. These groups are likely to play varying roles within



the individual's life, from fundamental affiliations to an ethnic community, to looser associations to sporting or employment related groupings.

According to Hogg and Abrams: "People derive their identity (their sense of self, their self-concept) in great part from the social categories to which they belong."<sup>18</sup>

It would appear obvious that the individual, if (s)he is to qualify for membership of a group, must satisfy a number of criteria for inclusion. It is perhaps less obvious that a group also shapes the individuals it incorporates as members: the individual modifies her or his behaviour in order to satisfy the demands of the group. As Barth records: "Since belonging to an ethnic category implies being a certain kind of person, having that basic identity, it also implies a claim to be judged, and to judge oneself, by those standards that are relevant to that identity."<sup>19</sup> This is likely to mean that the individual buys into the belief systems of the group. In the words of Hogg and Abrams: "people's views, opinions, and practices are acquired from those groups to which they belong."<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between individual and grouping is part of a two-way process. The individual represents a constituent part of the wider grouping and as such helps to influence and formulate the civic identity of the group. In turn, the group helps to influence the identity of the individual. As Hogg and Abrams argue: "the groups to which people belong, whether by assignment or by choice, will be massively significant in determining their life experiences."<sup>21</sup>

The individual, through her/his experiences takes on many of the perceived traits of the group to which (s)he belongs. As Hall posits: "we project 'ourselves' into these cultural identities, at the same time as internalizing their meanings and values, making them 'part of us', helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world."<sup>22</sup>

Crucial to our understanding of the role of groups in the process of identity formation are the notions of 'similarity' and 'difference'.<sup>23</sup> Hogg and Abrams argue that processes of identity formation mean that individuals and groups inevitably emphasise differences between themselves and others in society and that this leads them to perpetuate and exaggerate differences and discourage notions of similarity.<sup>24</sup> They state that: "there is a tendency to maximise intergroup distinctiveness – to differentiate between the groups as much as possible on as many dimensions as possible."<sup>25</sup> They conclude that:

*"By differentiating ingroup from outgroup on dimensions on which the ingroup falls at the evaluatively positive pole, the ingroup acquires a positive distinctiveness, and thus a relatively positive social identity in comparison to the outgroup."*<sup>26</sup>

Horowitz goes further by claiming that the emphasis on promoting difference leads academia to overlook the degrees of similarity between different ethnic groups: "The underlying mechanism is the perceptual tendency to simplify nuances of difference ignoring small differences and exaggerating large ones, when these begin to assume an unmanageable degree of complexity."<sup>27</sup>

Paraphrasing the Symbolic Interactionist School, Hall concludes:

*"identity is formed in the 'interaction' between self and society. The subject still has an inner core or essence that is 'the real me', but this is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds 'outside' and the identities which they offer."*<sup>28</sup>

It is extremely difficult to disentangle the processes associated with personal and group identity formation, for as Jenkins indicates, the two are part of simultaneous and complimentary processes.<sup>29</sup>

Having examined the roles of social categorisation and of groups, it is important to determine how these impact upon the processes of socialisation.

### ***(3.iv) Socialisation***

As I indicated in Chapter One, an important part of any discussion of identity formation must be a consideration of the processes of Socialisation. Erikson offers an insight into the psychological processes of socialisation. He identifies a number of distinct stages in what he describes as the 'Epigenesis of Identity'.<sup>30</sup> These stages move the individual from infancy, through phases of childhood, into adolescence and on to a phase, which he terms 'Beyond identity'. Within these stages a number of points of 'crisis' are reached which must be dealt with and reconciled by the individual.<sup>31</sup>

The starting point I adopt for the purposes of this chapter is similar to that used by Erikson which is that one begins the process of identification with a child, who is not equipped with any predetermined characteristics or skills.<sup>32</sup> This individual is not born with the ability to walk, talk, feed itself or choose its companions. These are all things that are learnt from those around them. To the same degree, a child is not born Irish or English, working class or middle class, these too are learnt; in much the same way as the former, more rudimentary social skills are learnt, often occurring within the same processes of socialisation and social interaction. These processes are undertaken in relation to a number of individuals and institutions within society.

If one accepts that a child is born into the world with no more than it has received; genetically, chemically and biologically, then the child is essentially a blank canvas,

which is then subject to contributions and inputs from a number of different sources; individuals and institutions. Everything that the child becomes is learnt from those individuals and institutions (s)he encounters, directly and indirectly within society. As Erikson states "At birth the baby leaves the chemical exchange of the womb for the social exchange system of his society, where his gradually increasing capacities meet the opportunities and limitations of his culture."<sup>33</sup> Erikson adds: "Personality, therefore, can be said to develop according to steps predetermined in the human organism's readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with a widening radius of significant individuals and institutions."<sup>34</sup> These 'steps' represent a series of incidences and interactions, which help to shape the individual's identity.

If one accepts Erikson's notion of 'steps' towards the development of a personality and identity and the role of a number of influential variables in shaping and potentially altering the direction of the individual's life and identity, then, it should be possible to identify who and what these factors are, and analyse their respective impact upon the identification process.

### ***(3.v) Layers of Identity***

In relation to the subject population, I identify three principal sets of influences. Firstly, parents exert the primary influence upon the individual's life in the period from birth to the age of eighteen years.<sup>35</sup> If they take on their responsibilities as parents, they are likely to occupy a number of different roles at crucial points in the individual's life. Alternatively, if they fail to take on their responsibilities, they may unintentionally deprive the child of access to aspects of her or his heritage.

As Erikson indicates, parents occupy the role of primary carers, assisting a child during the course of its development, as it learns to walk, talk and slowly begin to

undertake tasks for itself.<sup>36</sup> The parent supports the individual through these processes, spending considerable periods of time with the child, nurturing and enabling the individual to develop as an individual. During this process, it is inevitable that the parent shapes the child by the decisions (s)he takes on behalf of the child.

The parent is also likely to influence the child's moral and social values, influencing the child's attitudes to aspects of wider society. Parents have, within approximately the first eighteen years and particularly the first five years of the child's life, the ability to profoundly influence, positively or negatively, the child's social and emotional development. They instil such notions as 'right' and 'wrong', codes of acceptable behaviour and discipline. As one respondent states, his father was "very, very firm with us, which I think was a good thing". **(ID65)**

The role and influence of the parent may also be affected by their ethnicity, shaping the individual's access to different cultures, particularly within the context of a mixed ethnicity relationship. This may lead, for example, to the child accessing Irish cultural forms, as well as aspects of British culture. Although, as one subject cautioned, parents may not always discuss their own experiences and cultural heritage with their children. **(ID88)**

Parent(s) represent the first and potentially most enduring influence upon the individual, an influence which is then overlaid by further secondary influences, of other individuals, institutions and phenomena. These represent secondary layers, which aid the child in the development of a settled, yet continually fluid personality and identity. Even here, the role of the parents is crucial, controlling access to secondary layers of influence, to a range of phenomena, from other individuals to social institutions and structures. For example, parents control the access of the individual to organised religion, with the parent's own involvement or non-

involvement in a religious grouping or personal religious faith likely to affect whether their child is initiated into the rights of that faith. If they do so, this decision may shape aspects of that individual's life, including recreational activities and choice of school. As ID01 states of the role of religion in her upbringing: "It was very much the fact that the whole of family life revolved around." **(ID01)**

The role of the parent is such that its influence can be seen in almost all aspects of the individual's experience during childhood and adolescence, specifically in controlling access to secondary influences.

These secondary influences can be divided into two distinct types. These reflect Jenkins' distinction between internal (those within the individual's grouping) and external influences (those emanating from outside the group).<sup>37</sup>

In relation to internal factors, I focus on an array of influences including siblings, extended families, friends, recreational activities, holidays, religious affiliation, the local Irish community and cultural festivals. These all emanate from within the family and their ethnic community. These help shape the individual's identity, providing access to different aspects of culture, a range of people and new experiences. Individuals such as extended family members may serve as further potential role models; as significant others, whilst institutions may act to reinforce aspects of identity and culture provided by their parent(s). This is particularly important where this person is Irish and assists the individual in constructing a positive sense of their Irishness. A number of the interview subjects identify the existence of such a 'special bond' between themselves and particular members of their family, of a 'dear aunt' or attentive grandparent. **(ID16, ID45, ID72, ID90, ID107, ID108, ID110)** ID90 records that she had forged a relationship with her grandmother, which bridged the generational gap, stating "she really understood

me". She concludes: "She was the person I looked up to the most when I was growing up." **(ID90)**

The other set of influences are those which are external to the individual's own community. These are situated in the spheres of education, employment, wider society, in Ireland and in Birmingham as a location. Each of these impact upon the individual's identity, providing access to different aspects of culture and society. Indeed these frequently provide different messages, signals and influences to those offered by internal factors. For example, whilst access to the local community may serve to reinforce the messages the individual receives within the home, their wider experiences within Birmingham facilitates access to a range of stimuli within multi-ethnic Britain. Members of the research population are likely to have grown up in the city, attended city schools, have friends from non-Irish backgrounds, developed local social networks and supported local football teams. They experience the duality of having been born, lived and socialised in Birmingham, but with the added influence of an Irish parent(s) and an overarching Irish culture.

Their experiences, particularly within the British education system and their association with other young people in the city, are likely to heavily influence the individual within the identification process.

The significance of the locality for an individual's identity, which I underlined in Chapter One, is further stressed by Yancey et al in relation to the experiences of ethnic minority communities in the United States: "Ethnicity may have relatively little to do with Europe, Asia or Africa, but much more to do with the exigencies of survival and the structure of opportunity in this country. In short, the so-called 'foreign heritage' of ethnic groups is taking shape in this country."<sup>38</sup>

Each of these factors represents a layer of influence, which one can examine, but for their true impact upon the individual's identity, each must be viewed as a component in an overall process. Each represents a layer in a process, which ultimately shapes the individual's identity.

### ***(3.vi) Socialisation as a Lifelong Process***

Having applied Erikson's notion of 'steps' towards the formation of identity, it is important to assert that the primary period of socialisation is not all encompassing, it does not represent the end of the line in relation to the processes of identity formation.<sup>39</sup> As I state in Chapter One, I support the assertion that identity formation is a lifelong process. The fieldwork phase demonstrates that for a number of participants, their identity had undergone a series of changes and developments at key points in their life, a process, which was not restricted to the periods of childhood and adolescence. A number of respondents perceive themselves to offer significantly different interpretations of their identity between the ages of 30–45 years, to those they would have articulated between the ages of 18 and 30 years. As one subject records: "I think it has changed actually. From what I've said from growing up I would have considered myself more Irish when I was growing up, but now that I've got my own family, you know, I see myself as British." **(ID90)**

Secondly, socialisation affects individuals in differing ways and exposes individuals to such an array of influences that it is almost impossible to quantify how each of these affects individuals.

Finally, in attempting to ascertain how different influences and factors affect the individual's identity, one is effectively in the hands of the individual. It is the individual who consciously and sub-consciously makes sense of these influences. In relation to a study of this nature, which sets out to examine the relative significance



of different phenomena upon the individual's identity, it is the individual that interprets the significance of each agent. For example, they may identify the fact that they played Gaelic football or Camogie during childhood or the role of a particular teacher as being fundamental to their adoption of an Irish identity, without also outlining their contact with Ireland or experiences of discrimination. I discuss the significance that individuals attach to particular factors within the analysis of the fieldwork phase of this thesis.

As I established previously, identity formation must be viewed as a process that stretches from birth through to death. Within this variable time frame, the socialisation which occurs during childhood and adolescence represents a crucial, though by no means the only period of influence. As Jenkins indicates that, what takes place during this period of primary socialisation has a profound effect, not only on this period but also on the remainder of the individual's life: "Primary socialisation is the realm of categorisation and sets patterns for our receptiveness to being categorised in the life that follows."<sup>40</sup>

It can scarcely be doubted that (primary) socialisation has a central influence upon the processes of identity formation, individuals are born and are instantly subject to an array of pressures and influences from those directly around them. These influences play a key role in shaping the individual's identity. This is closely allied to the explanations of socialisation I have explored for, as Jenkins argues "Socialization is categorisation."<sup>41</sup>

The relationship between internal and external definition is further explored in Chapter Five, which relates much of the learning from this chapter to the position of the subject population within the conceptualisations of an Irish diaspora. First, I outline the methodological approach adopted for the various phases of the fieldwork.

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- <sup>9</sup> Jenkins, R. 1997, p.53
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- <sup>11</sup> Discussions of stereotyping are offered by innumerable authors, the following specifically refer to the phenomena in relation to the Irish. Feldman, D. There was an Englishman, an Irishman and a Jew... immigrants and minorities in Britain, Historical Journal, 26, 1983, Gray, B. 1997, pp.96-101, Hogg, M. A. & Abrams, D. 1996, pp.64-90, Fielding, S. 1993, pp.8-9, Dyer, R. 1997, pp.11-12, Chambers, I. 1994, pp.38-9, pp.73-4, Memmi, A. 1990, pp.145-155
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- <sup>13</sup> Jenkins, R. 1997, p.166
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- <sup>30</sup> Erikson, E. H. Identity: Youth and Crisis, 1983, p.91-6

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<sup>31</sup> Erikson, E. H. 1983, p.135

<sup>32</sup> Erikson, E. H. 1983, pp.92-3

<sup>33</sup> Erikson, E.H. 1983, pp.92-3

<sup>34</sup> Erikson, E.H. 1983, p.93

<sup>35</sup> In referring to parent(s), I acknowledge the realities of individuals who only have contact with one parent in the analysis, together with those who are 'cared for' by parental substitutes who, for different reasons, at different points in a child's life, take on the role of parent(s), including local authorities as the primary influence upon the child's development and socialisation. From this point forward I simply refer to the role of the parent, adopting the broadest definition.

<sup>36</sup> Erikson, E. H. 1993, p.91-107, Jenkins, R. 1997, p.58

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, R. 1997, pp.53-6

<sup>38</sup> Yancey, W. L. et al, 1976, p.400

<sup>39</sup> Jenkins, 1996, p.4 & p.20, Chambers, I. 1994, p.23

<sup>40</sup> Jenkins, R. 1997, p.73

<sup>41</sup> Jenkins, R. 1997, p.166

## **Chapter Four: Research Methodology**

### ***(4.i) Introduction***

The composition of the Irish community in Birmingham, its collective experiences and constrictions of political context mean that normal methodological considerations must be partially set to one side in the pursuit of fieldwork which explores identity related issues amongst the current research population.

It has been inferred that Irish communities throughout England have conducted their affairs in a quiet, unassuming manner, rather than draw attention to themselves.<sup>1</sup>

As previously argued, the rationale for this approach is largely attributed to the power relations of the Anglo-Irish historical relationship, events in Northern Ireland and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). The accumulative effect of these factors means that many Irish people maybe reluctant to discuss aspects of their experiences or may view those asking the questions with suspicion. This has significant consequences for this research. The reality is that many members of the research population may be reluctant to participate in research initiated from an unknown source. This reluctance is likely to be magnified in relation to Birmingham in the post-Pub Bombings period. As I argue in Chapter Seven, the bombings and the response they provoked, radically changed the dynamics of the relationship between the Irish community and the local population. These events changed not only the attitudes of elements within local society, but also the attitudes and behaviour of Irish people and organisations in the city, producing a more introverted and enclosed community. It is within this context that the current research was undertaken.

#### ***(4.ii) Methodological Approach: Selection***

The experiences of the research population and the political and environmental context in which the research was undertaken meant that I had to devise an approach which facilitated access to this group and ensured that its constituent membership would respond and participate in the research. The political backdrop to the research means that it was not possible, or methodologically sound, to adopt a randomised sampling approach in relation to this population grouping. It would have been impossible and ultimately fruitless for myself as an individual researcher to distribute questionnaires to potential respondents, without modifying the approach to reflect the experiences of this grouping.

The first stage in the fieldwork process is to devise a suitable sampling frame. The absence of base-line Census data, which would allow us to determine the actual size of this research population, means that it is impossible to construct such a sampling frame, which would ensure that a truly representative sample could be derived. The historical absence of a separate 'Irish' category within the British Census means that it is not possible to accurately state how many 'Second generation Irish' people there are in Birmingham, or to calculate the precise distribution of Irish people throughout the city. The absence of baseline data has also ensured that the Irish, and in particular those who are born in Britain, are overlooked in relation to other official statistics which would otherwise allow us to uncover the demographic make-up of the research population.

This conceals two inter-related problems. Firstly, how do we achieve a representative sample, which reflects the demographic make-up of the group? Secondly, how do we access members of the research population? Both are central to the success of the current research project.

### ***A Representative Sample***

In the absence of baseline data such as that from the Census, one is forced to look for other measures of representativeness. Firstly, I sought to ensure that the respondents reflected patterns of Irish settlement in Birmingham in the post-war period. Consequently, I used existing knowledge about patterns of Irish settlement in Birmingham in the period 1939-1970 and available 'Live Birth' data to map the main patterns of births within the Irish community in Birmingham, as a base from which to plot the likely demographic make-up of the research population. If one takes as a rough guide the notion that those who settled in the city are likely to establish personal relationships and have children within a period of five to ten years, then there is likely to have been a significant number of 'Irish' births from 1945 onwards and that this will level out in the immediate period following the peak of Irish settlement in the city. This is born out by available 'Live birth' data. In 1963, 3542 or 16% of births in the city were 'Irish' (at least one parent born in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland). This figure remained steady until 1968, when it decreased slightly to 14%, dropping to 12.9% in 1971, to 9.0% in 1975 and finally to 6.1% in 1978, when collection of the data ceased, reputedly for political reasons. Despite the partial nature of the data, we can at least begin to plot the demographics of the research population. Consequently, the sample reflects the suggested age-profile, with the bulk of respondents being drawn from the 26-56 age groups.

This still leaves other demographic considerations. In relation to gender, class and area of residence, once again the deficiencies of Census data means that we must resort to an approach which is grounded in 'common sense', rather than science. Therefore, I have sought to achieve a balance of male and female subjects, class backgrounds and an even coverage of areas of the city. Similarly, the absence of

data relating to the religious observance of Irish migrants means that it is extremely difficult to plot with any certainty the numbers of subjects who are drawn from the different religious groupings which are prevalent in Ireland. Once again, I have simply sought to ensure that each of the groupings is represented.

The demographic structure of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the relevant representation of each in Birmingham suggests that the majority of subjects will be drawn from the Republic of Ireland and the Roman Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities. Whilst it would be difficult to make any grand claims about the representative nature of the sample adopted, I have attempted to achieve a sample in which all the relevant sub-groupings are represented.

### ***Access to the Research Population***

The paucity of statistical data is just one dimension of the suggested 'invisibility' of the current research population.<sup>2</sup> Just as members of this grouping are hidden within much of the available statistical data, it can also be extremely difficult to physically locate these individuals within wider society. The fact that the majority of the current research population is 'White' and are likely to have non-Irish accents means that there is little to distinguish them from their contemporaries who are from non-Irish families. They may be more easily located by the identity they articulate, however, the prevailing historical and political context in which this research was undertaken may mean that individual members of this grouping are reluctant to proclaim their ethnic heritage within particular settings, further leading to their effective concealment.

The 'invisibility' of this grouping means that one must look to patterns of behaviour as a potential marker of difference. This leads one to the conclusion that subjects

could be accessed via networks linking them to their ethnic heritage, most notably those settings in which they participate in ethnically and culturally specific activities. For example, Irish cultural centres, dancing schools, Gaelic sports clubs or Irish language classes. This, however presents a serious methodological concern, as to concentrate on those who participate in Irish cultural activities is to potentially weight the sample toward those who are more likely to identify as 'Irish'. This may potentially only afford access to a section of the whole research population. This conflicts with my desire to explore processes of identity formation in relation to all sections of this population, including both those who identify as 'Irish' and those who do not. The latter tell us as much about these processes of identity formation and the nature of Irish identity within the research population, as the former. In order to achieve this I had to access all sections of the grouping. This meant accessing research subjects in both Irish and non-Irish settings. This required the implementation of a multi-layered approach to the fieldwork, with subject being accessed via a range of networks and in a myriad of settings.

Concerns about possible bias can be partially offset by identifying potential subjects via their parent(s) whose ethnicity is likely to be more evident, most notably through their accent. These individuals could then be used as a point of access to their children who are members of the research population. This helps to extend the range of potential responses, because different siblings may offer very different interpretations of their identities.

This however does overcome the central concern that I expressed at the beginning of this chapter, that of accessing a research population, which is reluctant to speak to 'strangers'. In order to overcome this obstacle, I adopted a snowballing approach, which utilised a series of 'gatekeepers' to facilitate access to a broad cross-section of the research population.



## ***'Gatekeepers'***

The principle role of the 'gatekeepers' was to identify potential research participants and to distribute survey questionnaires, but as I explain at a later point in this chapter, their role was also to add legitimacy to the research and to encourage potential respondents to complete and return questionnaires. Whilst acknowledging concerns regarding snowballing techniques, the use of such an approach is validated, in this case, by the historical and political backdrop against which the research is being undertaken and the perceived reluctance of this population to speak to a researcher around identity issues. As Gilbert records, such an approach is "useful when the potential subjects of the research are likely to be sceptical of the intentions of the researcher."<sup>3</sup> The events of the Anglo-Irish relationship and in particular the effects of the Birmingham Pub Bombings provide considerable grounds for suspicion and scepticism.

As previously outlined, in order to access the broadest possible cross-section of the research population, I sought to identify 'gatekeepers' in a wide range of arenas, both within and outside recognised Irish settings.

In order to identify 'gatekeepers' within Irish community organisations, I undertook a period of participation within a range of Irish organisations in Birmingham, including the Birmingham Irish Community Forum and Birmingham Irish Youth Group. I was also able to access other groupings within the community such as local language classes and the Tuesday Club (a grouping for Irish elders). From within these groupings I was able to identify a total of seventeen individuals who could act as 'gatekeepers'. Many of these individuals had a particular profile within the local Irish community, had led cultural groups or had a longstanding involvement in Irish activities in the city. Others were approached because they could provide access to potential respondents within specific age groups or sections of the community.

This period of active participation ensured that a bond of trust was established between myself and the 'gatekeepers'. In turn, the role of the 'gatekeepers' inferred a degree of legitimacy upon the research and increased the likelihood of participation by potential respondents.

'Gatekeepers' from outside the realms of Irish community settings were approached via a range of networks and contacts. Foremost amongst these were local schools (Roman Catholic and Non-Roman Catholic) and churches of various denominations. In each case, written or telephone contact was made with an individual head teacher, member of staff, member of the clergy or church administrator to introduce myself, briefly outline the nature of the research and request assistance in distributing the survey questionnaires. Where individuals agreed to support the distribution, they were briefed about the research and the intended recipients (both those who had been born in Ireland and those who had been born in Birmingham, with at least one parent who had been born in either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland), in order to reach the widest possible grouping.

Other 'gatekeepers' were located in local government departments which provided services to the public and therefore had members of the research population amongst its clients. Similarly groups which work around equalities issues, local cultural organisations were accessed as well as individuals who found out about the research by word of mouth or from other 'gatekeepers'.

Finally, a number of 'gatekeepers' were identified during the course of my own paid employment in which I was able to access non-Irish contacts in a number of settings to act as 'gatekeepers'. In each instance, 'gatekeepers' were clearly briefed. A total of fifteen 'gatekeepers' from outside Irish community settings were utilised in the distribution of survey questionnaires.

I sought to overcome concern that there would be a tendency for 'gatekeepers' to

locate individuals whose Irish links were known to them, which in many cases was likely to lead to a bias toward those who identify as 'Irish', by ensuring that the 'gatekeepers' distributed questionnaires to both those who had been born in Ireland with children and members of the research population.

As the questionnaire solicited multi-generational data from respondents, this could then be used to provide access to a far larger grouping. Thus from initially accessing one individual, I then had information relating to the respondents' children and siblings, who could then be sent copies of the questionnaire. This was done via the initial respondent, subject to the individual's expression of interest in further participation. This approach was guided by my own previous experience, which suggested that members of the same family units potentially may occupy a range of different identities and offer divergent interpretations of their links with Ireland.

The use of 'gatekeepers' raises an issue of potential bias, as the 'gatekeeper' is likely to distribute the questionnaires to members of their direct network, thus promoting responses from individuals who are drawn from the same social groupings.<sup>4</sup> This is partially overcome by briefing the 'gatekeeper' prior to the distribution and to the selection of 'gatekeepers' in a wide range of settings. Thus to ensure an even distribution of questionnaires, as well as identifying a relatively equal split of 'gatekeepers' from both within and outside the Irish community, 'gatekeepers' also reflected different gender, ethnic and religious balances.

The use of 'gatekeepers' also allowed for a periodic refocusing of distribution, in order to ensure representation of particular groups within society. For example, once I had received approximately 100 questionnaires it became apparent that the sample was heavily biased toward respondents from the Roman Catholic tradition. At this stage only approximately 2% of respondents were from the Protestant traditions. Consequently, I set out to identify further 'gatekeepers' within settings in

which individuals from these traditions are likely to be engaged. This was initially problematic, because there were no obvious secular settings in which this group could be easily accessed, consequently I had to concentrate on religious settings. I contacted a number of individuals who held city-wide or regional briefs within the Church of England, United Reformed Church and Methodist faith. A number of these individuals agreed to act as 'gatekeepers' or to identify other individuals to take on this role. In order to overcome the previously identified problem of only accessing a narrow strand of this grouping, in this case the potential bias was likely to be toward those who were active within the church, I once again chose to extend distribution to those individuals who were born in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland with adult offspring who had been born in Birmingham. This yielded individuals who were currently active within churches, those who were not and a number who had converted to another religious faith.

The only remaining concern regarding potential bias lies in the fact that those individuals who adopt some form of identity which acknowledges their links with 'Ireland' may be more likely to complete and return the questionnaires and express an interest in further participation in the research process. This, was at least, partially borne out in the relation to the questionnaire and specifically in respect of use of comments and other boxes. Those who identified a form of identity that included a reference to their Irish links were more likely to have things to say, the presumption being that those who did not identify as Irish, did not feel that it was as important to them as individuals.

The thirty-two 'gatekeepers' were given a total of more than three hundred survey questionnaires to distribute to members of the research population and their parents' generation. A number were specifically targeted to reach the different sub-groupings which have already been identified. All potential respondents were given a copy of

the questionnaire, together with a stamped addressed envelope, which was to be returned directly to the researcher at the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick. This ensured that neither the 'gatekeeper' or any other individual had access to the data supplied.

A total of one hundred and twenty survey questionnaires were returned. Ninety of these were from members of the research population. Of the remaining thirty, twenty were from individuals were born in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland and ten were from the 'third generation'. Both of these groupings were targeted by the 'gatekeepers' and a number were subsequently used as a filter to the further members of the research population.

The use of 'gatekeepers' and a multi-layered approach to the fieldwork ensured access to a considerable number of individuals, within different settings, with a range of experiences. Thus achieving a cross-section of the research population which would not have been possible using other methodological approaches.

#### ***(4.iii) Questionnaire Format***

The questionnaire was designed to occupy two roles within the fieldwork phase of the research, firstly, to provide research data and secondly, to act as a filter to the interview stage of the fieldwork.

It was designed to obtain basic data both about the individual and her/his experiences. This included information such as their place of birth, familial relationships, contact with Ireland, participation in cultural activities, experiences of discrimination and their perception of their identity. The latter was achieved by asking the individual to select labels which they felt reflected their identity, these included those relating to local and national identity. The individual could select as many or as few of these labels as they wished. Participants were also afforded the

opportunity to self-define their identity.

The data from the questionnaire was then collated in an attempt to plot the experiences and attitudes of the subject population. For example, I was able to calculate the numbers of the sample that had visited Ireland on an annual basis in childhood and compare this to contact with Ireland now. Similarly, I was able to begin to map the experience of the grouping in relation to discrimination and experiences of abuse.

The questions within the questionnaire can broadly be divided into a number of key groupings. These included basic personal information (age, gender, place of birth, areas of residence), identity, educational and employment experiences, familial information, religion, contact with Ireland, participation in cultural activities and experiences of discrimination. These categories relate both to the individuals' historical and current experiences of each phenomenon.

In addition to providing research data, the questionnaire was designed to act as a filter to the interview. The questionnaire respondents were subsequently divided according to the responses they gave to the questions relating to their identity.

The responses from the questionnaires were entered into an Access database package, allowing for the collation of responses, presentation of analysis and cross filtering of responses. Once again this aided both the presentation of data and the selection of candidates for the interview phase. The database automatically attributed to each subject an individual identification (ID) number. I then adopted this ID number as a tool of identification for the purposes of the remainder of the research, both in relation to the interview process and the subsequent analysis and presentation of research data. This avoided the need to adopt false identities to ensure the anonymity of respondents. The database also allowed for the production of a summary document of responses for each subject. This was subsequently used

for the purposes of analysis and as a prompt during the course of interview, allowing for the specific tailoring of questions according to the experiences of the individual.

The methodological approach adopted produced a good rate of survey return, particularly in the initial phase of the fieldwork. The use of 'gatekeepers' appears to be central to this success, as the apparent bond of trust that existed between 'gatekeeper' and respondent meant that respondents felt a greater degree of commitment to the research and compulsion to complete and return the questionnaire than would have been likely had the researcher distributed them directly.

#### ***(4.iv) Interviews***

As the research sought to examine the processes of identity formation and the individual's perception of the significance of a series of phenomena and particular incidents for their identity, it was essential to gauge in-depth the attitudes and experiences of interviewees. I concluded that the best tool to achieve this aim was the in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interview. This provided a greater degree of flexibility and allowed the interview to be guided by the interviewee rather than the interviewer.

A schedule was drawn up for the interviews which broadly explored the areas covered by the questionnaire, in addition to previously uncovered areas which were prompted by the analysis of the questionnaire responses and the greater scope offered by the interviews. The schedule was divided into broad subject areas such as parents, education and contact with 'Ireland'. Once again these related to both experiences in childhood and adulthood. Within these broad headings, were a series of additional areas, which could be picked up or discarded according to the experiences of the individual. The schedule was used as a menu, with the interview

being shaped by the responses of the subject, both in the interview and the questionnaire, as prompted by the summary document.

Fifteen in-depth interviews were undertaken, each lasting between sixty and one hundred and twenty minutes. All took place in a venue selected by the respondent as a setting in which (s)he felt comfortable. For some, this meant in their own home, others their working environment and others, a neutral venue. All interviews were recorded, subject to the individual's approval and all were transcribed.

### ***Selection of Interview Subjects***

The interview subjects were chosen by dividing all those who had expressed an interest in participating further in the research into three distinct groupings, differentiated by the labels of identity they selected. Consequently, a third of interviewees were drawn from those who selected 'Irish' labels only, a third, who chose 'British' and/or 'English' labels only and the final third from those who selected a series of labels. This approach was adopted in order to ensure that as broad a cross-section of identities and experiences was explored, to determine why individuals select and reject each of the labels available to this broader grouping.

Having divided the potential interview participants into these three groupings, I then sought to ensure that those who were selected for interview were reflective of the wider research population. I thus sought to ensure that there was a balance of male and female respondents, of individuals from different age groups, with a concentration in the 26-55 years grouping, in line with the available live birth data and those who had grown up in different parts of Birmingham.

I also ensured that individuals who were 'Mixed Race Irish' and those from the various Protestant backgrounds were represented. In both of these cases two subjects from these groupings were interviewed.



The aim of the interview phase was primarily to derive data which offers an insight into the experiences of the various individuals, rather than data which could be generalised in relation to the wider research population. Thus the number of interviewees selected from these different sub-sections of the research population may not reflect the proportionate size of these sub-groupings, but merely ensures that the different groupings are present and allowed for a limited level of comparative analysis to take place. For example, in relation to the Mixed Race interviewees, one is female, the other male. Similarly, of the two interviewees from 'Protestant' faiths, one had been a member of the United Reformed Church, the other from the Church of England.

The aim was to select fifteen interview subjects who reflected a broad-section of the research population.

#### ***(4.v) Analysis and Presentation of Data***

Interview transcriptions were analysed using a series of analytical approaches which have been outlined by Strauss. This centres on a three stage analysis using 'Open', 'Axial' and 'Selective' coding.<sup>5</sup>

During 'Open coding', the researcher reads through the data, assigning initial labels or codes and thus begins the process of dividing the research data into identifiable categories. As this is this first stage, the researcher will continually identify new labels or codes.<sup>6</sup>

The second stage, 'Axial Coding' allows the researcher to review the initial coding and begin to identify the key, broad themes within the data.<sup>7</sup> In relation to the current research, these themes include parental roles, educational experience, labels adopted and access to Ireland.

During the final stage, 'Selective Coding', the researcher draws out examples and statements from the data which illustrate the central themes which have been identified at different stages in the coding process.<sup>8</sup> For example, in relation to the role of parental influence I was able to identify a series of statements from interview subjects regarding the behaviour, attitudes and experiences of their parents to illustrate sub-themes such as ethnicity, discipline and gender divisions.

This three-stage analysis allows for a detailed and thorough examination of the research data.

I chose to manually analyse the research data, rather than use a computer driven package such as NUDIST, in order to increase my familiarity with the material and allow my own knowledge of events in Birmingham in the period since World War II to contextualise the responses and experiences of the subjects. As Neumann states: "A qualitative researcher takes advantage of her personal insight, feelings and perspective as a human being, to understand the social life under study".<sup>9</sup>

The data is subject to three levels of interpretation.<sup>10</sup> The reflective nature of the questions within the interview process means that the responses are subject to the interpretation placed upon events and influences by the subject as part of 'First Order Interpretation'. The data is then subject to 'Second Order Interpretation', whereby the researcher interprets the data, before being filtered through 'Third Order Interpretation, during which the researcher: "assigns general theoretical significance".<sup>11</sup>

The data was grouped thematically and divided into five distinct sections. The first of these concentrates on the labels which the respondents select or reject as badges of identity, examining the rationales for the various approaches and the meaning which subjects attach to each label. The subsequent sections then examine the factors which have helped shape their identity and led them to adopt particular

labels. The central aim is to construct a narrative of the experiences of the research population in relation to processes of identity formation. This the allows the concluding chapter to relate the fieldwork data related back and ground it in the various strands of theory developed during the course of the earlier chapters.

### ***References***

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<sup>1</sup> Garry, K. 1990, p.2

<sup>2</sup> Considerable attention has been given over to the notion of the invisibility of the Irish in Britain. See Walter, B. Challenging the Black/White Binary: The Need for an Irish Category in the 2001 Census, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol.32, no.2, 1998, pp.73-86. Hickman, M. J. Racism and Identity: Issues for the Irish in Britain, in Ranger, T. et al (eds), Culture, Identity and Politics: Ethnic Minorities in Britain, 1996, Hickman, M. & Walter, B. Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain, 1997, Hickman, M. J. Reconstructing, Deconstructing 'Race': British Political Discourses about the Irish in Britain, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.21, No.2, Routledge Journals, 1998

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert, N. (ed.), Researching Social Life, 1993, p.74

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert, N. 1993, p.74

<sup>5</sup> Strauss, A. Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists, 1987 in Neuman, W. L. Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 1994, pp.407-9

<sup>6</sup> Strauss, A. in Neuman, W. L. 1994, pp.407

<sup>7</sup> Strauss, A. in Neuman, W. L. 1994, pp.408

<sup>8</sup> Strauss, A. in Neuman, W. L. 1994, pp.409

<sup>9</sup> Neumann, W. L. 1994, p.324

<sup>10</sup> Neumann, W. L. 1994, p.324

<sup>11</sup> Neumann, W. L. p.324

## **Chapter Five: A Case Study of Categorisation versus Self-Identification - The Place of the Subject Population within Conceptualisations of an Irish Diaspora**

### ***(5.i) Introduction***

Having explored primary definitions of identity and the significance of internal and external modes of identification in Chapter Three, it is now important to apply this to the case of 'Second generation Irish' people in Birmingham.

This chapter focuses on the notion that whilst the individual may be sure of her/his sense of identity, this is then subject to the attitudes, perceptions and reactions of others within British and Irish societies. The fieldwork findings demonstrate that the research population experiences questioning of their identity from a number of sources.

I then examine the consequences of such responses for the conceptualisation of an Irish diaspora and the position of members of the research population within such constructions.

### ***(5.ii) A Case Study of Internal and External Modes of Identification***

An individual who grows up in Birmingham, with parental links to Ireland will develop an awareness of her/his experiences within local society, with varying degrees of exposure to Ireland, Irish culture and the local Irish community. During the primary period of socialisation, the individual seeks to make sense of the different signals (s)he receives from individuals and groups within British and Irish societies. For some, this fusion of experiences and cultures results in the individual adopting a form of identity which incorporates an Irish dimension. Such an individual may, despite the complex nature of the processes of identity formation, be extremely

assured and comfortable in her/his identity. Despite this confidence, the individual is likely to experience a questioning of her/his identity from different sources.

### ***Sources of Questioning***

Perhaps most understandably, much of this questioning is likely to come from elements within British society. Individuals may be questioned about their Irishness and on occasions they may be told that they are not Irish, that they are British: "I am Irish! No you are not, listen to your accent, you're English. No I am not I am Irish!" **(ID27)** In some instances, this questioning manifests itself in the form of harassment at the hands of individuals who appear to feel betrayed by the decision to identify as Irish. In the most extreme case, ID88 records that she has not disclosed her Irish identity or heritage to anyone within her workplace, because of the perceived prejudicial attitudes of her colleagues.<sup>1</sup> **(ID88)**

It is perhaps more surprising and disturbing to discover that British society is not the only arena in which members of the subject population report experiencing a questioning of their identity. There are two further sources of questioning.

Firstly, a number of subjects complain that, when they visit Ireland, be it for holidays or longer periods, they experience a persistent and undermining questioning of their identity. **(ID27, ID41, ID42, ID87, ID110)** ID27 recounts his experience of visiting Ireland and the realisation that he actually endured the same types of reaction to the notion that he was 'Irish' from Irish people in Ireland as he had done in Birmingham:

*"You come across the... same as you would over here, you come across the odd minority who would be slightly ignorant to the fact that you would be Irish, even*

*though you had an English accent, so you would get a similar sort of bully over there as you would over here.”(ID27)*

It would appear difficult for some people in 'Ireland' to comprehend that someone, who was born in Birmingham with at least one parent who had been born in 'Ireland', should see her/himself as 'Irish'. For such individuals, to be considered Irish, it would appear that they must have been born in the thirty-two counties of the island of Ireland and in some cases, in the twenty-six counties of the Republic of Ireland. For those born in Britain and even in Northern Ireland (despite territorial claims to the territory of Northern Ireland which remained part of the Republic's Constitution until the Belfast Agreement Referendum of 1999), there is an assumption, amongst a section of the population in the Republic of Ireland, that they are somehow less Irish, or even not Irish at all.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that those who were born in Ireland, who have emigrated and later chose to return to Ireland also complain of never quite being accepted as being truly Irish. Gray states that if you went back, you were considered: "returned empties".<sup>3</sup>

For the research population, the questioning they experience in Ireland leaves them confused. Many of these individuals will have spent much of their lives viewing themselves as Irish, immersing themselves in aspects of Irish culture, coming to terms with the duality of having been born in Birmingham and ultimately embracing a form of Irish identity. It then comes as a profound shock to have their identity questioned in the very setting in which they would expect it to be re-affirmed. As a respondent to the survey phase states:

*"Being born of Irish parents – being second generation Irish does pose its problems as one is neither 100% 'Irish' or 'English'. If you were black then it would be obvious to others that one's background wasn't straight forward. Being White Second Generation is not visual obviously, so people find it hard to realise your roots are equally important. In Ireland one is definitely perceived as English."* **(ID42)**

The situation in Irish society and its attitudes towards those born outside the island of Ireland affects the other arena in which members of the subject population experience a questioning of their identity. This is perhaps the most disappointing source of questioning, for it comes from within local Irish communities. Some individuals within these communities also have a narrow view of who can and cannot be Irish. This view sites that only those who were born in the Republic of Ireland can truly be Irish. As one research subject states: "Going back to childhood here it was the situation of Irish people regarding you as English and English people regarding you as Irish". **(ID33)**

Having established that so-called 'Second-generation Irish' have their identity questioned in the very settings in which they could reasonably expect it to be reaffirmed, it is important to determine why this should be the case. I argue that this is firmly rooted in conceptualisations of the Irish diaspora.

### ***(5.iii) The Irish Diaspora***

The uncertainty facing members of the research population and the debate regarding who can and cannot be Irish reflects the lack of understanding of the whole subject of the Diaspora and its relationship to Irish society. As Joe Horgan, a self-styled 'Second generation Irish' columnist for the Irish Post newspaper records: "In many ways the immigrant Irish have been erased from the Irish imagination."<sup>4</sup> This has

direct implications for the identity and perceptions of those who were born in Birmingham, thus leading to the conclusion that:

*"People here do not understand and do not seem to wish to understand our Irishness. The fact that our Irishness, which took root outside the island itself, is as valid and genuine as theirs is not even considered. This is my country too and I lay claim to it."*<sup>5</sup>

It can scarcely be debated that Irish society has never been allowed to come to terms with the phenomena of the diaspora, mass emigration has, in the period since Irish independence, been little short of a national embarrassment.<sup>6</sup> As Hickman states: "Despite the fact that more Irish-born people live in London than in any other city except Dublin and Belfast, the quintessential Irish migrant always appears to be someone who left for the USA in the 19<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>7</sup>

Ireland as an island has experienced the continuous mass migration of its people in the period since the onset of the nineteenth century. This movement has been on a scale incomparable with any other European state, indeed, Akenson suggests that this represents the: "greatest mass migration of human beings in world history."<sup>8</sup> For generations, a significant proportion of its number were bound to leave Ireland for Britain, the United States, Australia and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

The natural corollary of this exodus is that for generations Irish people have been arriving and settling in villages, towns and primarily cities throughout Britain, the United States and innumerable other destinations. In settling in these locations, emigrants sought employment, formed ethnic communities, established relationships with individuals within and outside these communities and many had children. These communities were then refreshed by successive generations and new waves of



migrants, adding further layers of population and strengthening the Irish presence in these locations. Within a relatively short period, these migrant settlements constituted multi-generational, demographically diverse and cross-class based communities.

Whilst such communities were emerging in Birmingham and London, similar clusters, assisted by patterns of chain migration, were developing in New York, Boston, Sydney and elsewhere. The patterns of economic development within these host societies ensured that at different points in history, new centres of Irish settlement emerged to feed local demands for labour and increase the number of such communities over a sustained period. It is important to note that, as the focus shifted from one city to another, some centres ceased to be major centres of Irish settlement. This however does not mean that these sites instantaneously ceased to be homes to Irish communities, merely that the structure and development of these communities changed over time.

The phenomena of mass migration and widespread dispersal of Irish peoples over a period of more than two hundred years has facilitated the establishment of a myriad of Irish communities scattered throughout the world. These communities are very different in structure, age and complexity. Indeed, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, the structure and identity of these communities has been heavily dependent upon and reflective of the societies in which the Irish settled. I merely suggest that these communities form a world-wide collective of peoples who look back to Ireland as their spiritual 'home'. This collective is the Irish diaspora.

#### ***(5.iv) Diaspora Concepts***

The term 'diaspora' is derived from the Greek 'dia' meaning 'through' and 'speirein' to scatter and is commonly used to refer to the process of the dispersal of a group of

people from a common geographical site.<sup>10</sup> Throughout history there are innumerable examples of events and phenomena that have precipitated the creation of diasporic communities, these include economic factors, violent oppression, expulsion and slavery.<sup>11</sup>

As I outline in the introduction, Cohen argues that the establishment of the Irish Diaspora can be traced to "an analogous trauma": the Famine of 1845-52.<sup>12</sup> Thus Cohen restricts the Irish to occasional, illustrative references. Despite Cohen's assurances, I support the assertion that Irish migration should not be treated as a historical phenomenon, but rather as an on-going process.<sup>13</sup> Whilst undoubtedly the roots of the Irish Diaspora are to be found in the 'trauma' of the Famine period, its development owes much to the economic underdevelopment of Ireland and uneven relationship between Ireland and Britain during the period since 1801. Irish migration did not cease in 1852, thus an analysis, which concentrates too heavily upon the role of the Famine, neglects the reality of more than two centuries of emigration from the island of Ireland. It is also important to record that the diaspora incorporates both the original migrants and successive generations of their offspring within a multi-generational collective. This point is frequently overlooked.

The notion of a diaspora is underpinned by the existence of three primary phenomena; the existence of a centre, a destination and a series of 'multiple journeys'.<sup>14</sup>

For the Irish diaspora, the centre is the island of Ireland. The migrant and successive generations look to Ireland not only as the place they or their forebears left, physically and emotionally, but also as a primary marker within their identity. The centre serves as both a point of departure and the chief centre of emotional orientation for members of the diaspora.<sup>15</sup> For many, this extends to the adoption of

the term 'home' to refer to Ireland. For, whilst one's life is lived out in suburban Britain or the United States, one looks back to Ireland as a spiritual seat of belonging. As Gray states: "Ireland is a diaspora, and as such is both a real place and a remembered place".<sup>16</sup> An Irish Post reader, when asked 'Where is home?' states:

*"I was born here in Britain but, if I had enough money, I'd live in Ireland because that is where I consider to be my home. It sounds strange, I know and maybe that is because my parents, who have been here 35 years, also talk about going 'home' when they refer to Ireland"*<sup>17</sup>

The existence of a series of Irish communities scattered throughout the world that collectively look to the island of Ireland as a centre or as 'home', is the embodiment of the Irish diaspora. These myriad communities have few, if any, firm links with one another, other than at the psychological level of knowing and acknowledging that they are 'Irish'. 'Home' as a concept is discussed in relation to the fieldwork data.

The nature of Irish history and the centrality of migration within this narrative allows us to map the development of a multi-layered, multi-generational and geographically dispersed collective. As Gray states: "The term Irish diaspora represents the Irish people as a national collectivity which has been broken apart by centuries of emigration, while also being enriched by transnational connections at familial, political and cultural levels."<sup>18</sup>

Implicit in the acknowledgement of a centre or 'home' and of the role of the process of migration, is the existence of a destination. This destination, the migrant's point

of arrival, plays a central role in the lives of such individuals. The destination provides the immediate environment and everyday reality for the individual and is therefore crucial to her/his identity. (S)he takes on aspects of her/his reality and reflects this in the labels of identity (s)he adopts. Thus one finds Irish-Americans and African-Americans. Whilst the centre or 'home' provides the emotional core for the individual, it is the destination which offers the co-ordinates of her/his everyday life.

The position of the destination within the lives of individuals is such as to lead Brah to question the very notion of diaspora. She asks: "Can we speak of a 'South Asian diaspora' other than as a mode of description of a particular cluster of migrations?"<sup>19</sup>

The attachment of the individual to their locality is likely to increase with the passing of successive generations, with the integration of initial migrants and socialisation of subsequent generations fuelling increasing emotional attachment.

The location shapes the individual and collective identities of the group, for as Brah states: "the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively."<sup>20</sup>

The final component of the diaspora is the notion of the existence of journeys. At a personal level, the individual moves from one geographical point, 'home' to another, the destination. At the global level, this process is replicated by a myriad of independent, yet interlinked actors. These movements occur at different points in history, for differing reasons and to a range of destinations. Thus leading to the development of a series of communities scattered across the globe. This notion of 'multiple journeys' is stressed by Brah: "Each such diaspora is an interweaving of

multiple travelling; a text of many distinctive and, perhaps even disparate narratives."<sup>21</sup>

These journeys are undertaken on two distinct, yet interlinked levels. Firstly, the obvious physical embodiment of the journey, the movement from one geographical place to another and secondly, the emotional level, with the individual coming to terms with a new set of values and norms. The significance of these journeys is that they are 'historicised'.<sup>22</sup> They are documented and given significance within the minds of members of the diaspora, their commonalities binding its constituents in their experiences and their exile:

*"it is the economic, political and cultural specificities linking these components that the concept of diaspora signifies. This means that these multiple journeys may configure into one journey via a confluence of narratives as it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory."*<sup>23</sup>

In relation to the Irish diaspora, the three components, which combine to make-up the very notion of a diaspora, are plainly visible. 'Home' is the landmass of Ireland that, despite having been physically left behind at some point in history, is still looked back to as an emotional core for Irish communities throughout the world. The 'destination' is the towns and cities across the world that successive generations of Irish migrants have settled in. Finally, the myriad of journeys that Irish migrants make and have made at the physical and emotional levels across a number of centuries.

Having explored academic interpretations of Diaspora and argued the case for classification of the Irish as such a diasporic community, I now offer one significant qualification.

***(5.v) Conceptualisations of Diaspora: What of those who remain at 'Home'?***

Thus far in this chapter I have concentrated on the emigrant communities and their experiences. I argue that these collectives envisage and identify themselves as Irish and by looking back to Ireland acknowledge and embrace the existence of an Irish diaspora. I have not to date examined the seat of this diaspora: Irish society. Whilst the disparate communities are confident of both the existence of the diaspora and their own place within it, I am not convinced that Irish society itself has yet similarly embraced this concept.

For individuals who live on the island of Ireland, particularly those who have never lived outside the confines of territorial borders of the Republic of Ireland, Ireland is something that exists all around them. As I record elsewhere in this chapter, Ireland has never been allowed to come to terms with its experience of mass migration. De Valera in particular constructed a picture of an idyllic rural heartland, images that were incompatible with the reality of thousands of Irish people leaving Ireland every year.<sup>24</sup> The result was that the latter was sacrificed in order to preserve the former. The experience of emigrant Irish communities has consequently barely featured in the Irish education system or media coverage, leaving few alternative outlets for examination of this experience.

Whilst the process of migration is undoubtedly a two-faceted phenomena, with the individual leaving one place and arriving in another, academic and social literature of

Irish migration has tended to focus on the effects upon Irish society, rather than on those who are the central actors. Thus one finds, within texts written and published in Ireland, innumerable references to the depopulation of the western seaboard of Ireland and the economic hardship caused by mass migration, with few references to the new realities of those who left.<sup>25</sup>

There are considerable accounts of the Irish experience of migration, with excellent studies of Irish communities in Britain, United States and Australia, but these are invariably produced for local academic and social audiences. Such local interest has little impact upon Irish society's knowledge of the emigrant communities. Arguably, Irish fiction represents one of the few mediums which has offered an exploration of the experiences of the diaspora.<sup>26</sup>

It is unsurprising that a society which has never been allowed to come to terms with the phenomena of mass migration, cannot deal with the notion that Ireland exists outside the boundaries of the island of Ireland and finds it difficult to conceptualise the existence of Irish communities abroad. If one were to tell a cross-section of people in Dublin that there are more than 100,000 Irish people in Birmingham, the response is likely to be one of surprise. The blame for this lies with Irish political leaders, educationalists and media executives who have failed to explain where all those people went and what they and their children are doing now.<sup>27</sup> Despite recent progress, it would appear that the role of educating the core as to the history and contribution of the diaspora will still largely fall to the diaspora.

This however poses a major problem in relation to the conceptualisation of an Irish diaspora within Irish society, in Ireland. The existence of an Irish diaspora is embraced by those in disparate Irish communities across the world, yet is barely comprehended, let alone acknowledged by elements within Irish society.

The next question must be, what effect does this have upon notions of Irish identity?

### ***(5.vi) Hierarchies of Irishness***

Gray asserts that diasporic concepts provide a useful tool for the examination of the experiences of Irish people world-wide: "the notion of 'diaspora' infers an inclusiveness that allows for different geographical locations and ways of living out Irishness".<sup>28</sup> This is of particular significance for the 'Second' and subsequent generations of people who were born outside of the island of Ireland, for such a conception allows individuals to acknowledge their associations with both Ireland and the locations in which they live. Indeed, it is only as part of such an approach that one can hope to record the attitudes, experiences and identities of this grouping.

However, I argue that there is also a major drawback to the adoption of such an approach. As Gray acknowledges, amidst conceptualisations of an Irish Diaspora, there exists the acknowledgement of different notions of Irishness and different ways of playing out this difference. There is also a tacit acceptance of the existence of hierarchies of Irishness, whereby those living on the island of Ireland are the true Irish people, whilst those outside are somehow less Irish.

For Irish communities in England, generational differences represent arguably the most profound cleavage, but in this instance generational differences relate not to the relative chronological ages or the period of birth, but rather to the place of birth and experience of migration. The 'first generation' are those who, regardless of age, are born on the island of Ireland and who migrate to England and elsewhere at various points. The 'second generation', those who are born in England, with at least one parent who had been born in Ireland. The 'third generation' are those who are born in England, with at least one grandparent who had been born in Ireland and



the 'fourth generation', great grandparents and so on through successive generations.

These hierarchies of Irishness are also inextricably bound up in the two-sided nature of identity formation, the individual generates her/his identity, yet is also characterised and labelled by external elements within society. Her/his identity is firmly shaped by the position of the individual and those who occupy the external role. The individual constantly re-evaluates who is and who can be Irish according to her/his own position. Thus different people construct different hierarchies of Irishness, according to factors such as place of birth, age, gender, situations and personal relationships.

Within one such reading, those who are born in the Republic of Ireland are the true, authentic Irish people. As I indicate previously, those who are born in Northern Ireland are often perceived to be some how less Irish than those who are born in the neighbouring twenty-six counties.

The next layer is made up of those who were born in Birmingham, Manchester or Boston, with one or more parents who were born in Ireland. Such individuals occupy a lesser tier of Irishness, as they are Irish by virtue of familial relationships rather than their own place of birth. They are therefore deemed to be less Irish than those who are Irish by virtue of their own birthright. In relation to this grouping, the notion of hierarchy operates at a number of different levels in respect of other generations and amongst those within the same generational grouping.

Firstly, those who were born in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland may deem their own children to be Irish, sometimes regardless of the labels these individuals adopt for themselves, yet may offer a less inclusive approach to other individuals with the same familial connections. Their own offspring may be Irish

through and through, whilst these other individuals may be perceived to be 'Plastic Paddies'.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, individuals who were born in Birmingham may see themselves as being authentically Irish, yet may label other individuals with exactly the same familial connections to Ireland as being somehow less Irish.

A differentiation is also drawn between individuals in different parts of the Irish diaspora. For example, those in Birmingham may believe themselves to be authentically Irish, yet may be disparaging about the identity of Irish-Americans. The perception being that Irish-Americans are merely clinging to a 'symbolic' ethnic identity that owes its origins to Irish migrants who left Ireland two centuries ago. Such views are also replicated within Irish America, with Irish-Americans occupying a higher position within the hierarchy of Irishness than those who were born in England. For example, in a discussion of the recent successes of Irish artists such as U2, Seamus Heaney and Michael Flatley, O'Hanlon states that: "beyond even this galaxy there were the non-Irish-born Irish like the band Oasis, Jack Charlton and even Bill 'I look Irish' Clinton. There seemed to be a line forming: 'This way if you want to be Irish too!'"<sup>30</sup> In addition to incorrectly inferring that Jack Charlton is Irish, O'Hanlon draws a distinction between Chicago-born Michael Flatley and the Manchester-born Gallagher brothers. One is elevated to the level of the 'legitimate' Irish, whilst the other pair are castigated as mere 'band-wagoners'.

An individual who is born in England, yet returns to Ireland as a baby, to be socialised and educated within Irish society is likely to be universally accepted as Irish more readily than someone who is born in and remained in Britain. For example, former Republic of Ireland international footballer David O'Leary, who was born in London and returned to Ireland as an infant, did not experience the same questioning of his authenticity as some of his colleagues. This runs contrary to the

fact that they are both the children of Irish migrants. One possible explanation for this difference is the presence of accent as a signifier of difference. An Irish accent represents a primary symbol of Irishness and a clear way of signalling difference in a society in which both the migrant and the host community are predominantly white, European and predominantly Christian. Those who are born outside Ireland do not have Irish accents and are therefore not instantly recognisable as being Irish. Indeed, it has been suggested that some within the research population adopt their own interpretation of an Irish accent, as an indicator of their Irishness, in much the same way as African-Caribbean people in Britain adopt a form of patois. As Scully records, for some individuals: "Their visibility as Irish was exercised through the brogue."<sup>31</sup> She also asserts that in many cases: "the brogue was utilised in a deliberate and exaggerated form."<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that in relation to African-Caribbean people the use of patois is an acceptable cultural form, whereas, within the Irish community, the adoption of an Irish brogue is widely frowned upon. For example, ID01 states that she has a friend who, despite having been born and reared in Birmingham, possesses a "good strong Irish accent":

*"I always thought that was weird, she doesn't seem to assimilate anything from being from Birmingham, being part of English culture, you know. It was just totally submerged in Irish culture... I think if you're living in a country... you take things from that."* **(ID01)**

London-born Irish woman, Siobhan Toman, writing in 'The Irish Post', states that her "tongue operates on a dual-accent system and always has done." Her accent changes according to whom she is speaking to at any given time.<sup>33</sup> Toman's article

prompted responses from disgruntled readers: "Siobhan, try to be yourself and why in God's name should you have to change accents just to suit other people?"<sup>34</sup>

The existence of a hierarchy of Irishness is arguably best stressed in relation to the 'third and subsequent generations' of Irish people. It is widely perceived that the Irish assimilate into British society within little more than two generations of their arrival.<sup>35</sup> This has made it extremely difficult for individuals who are born in Birmingham, with an Irish grandparent or great-grandparent to articulate an Irish ethnic identity that is acceptable to the Irish community and wider society. This has largely confined such individuals to the realms of symbolic attachment to their ethnic heritage, with those who articulate an Irish identity being dismissed as attempting to jump on the ethnic bandwagon. Whilst this reflects Gans' notion of 'Symbolic Ethnicity', I argue that significant numbers of this grouping would articulate that they are 'Irish', but are deterred from doing so by the reactions of others, specifically within Irish communities in Britain. These individuals are likely to find themselves having their identity questioned by those, within the 'second generation' who in turn find themselves being questioned by those who were born in Ireland. This is stressed by the fieldwork findings, in which a number of respondents state that their children are unquestionably English, even where the child expresses an interest in Ireland and participates in aspects of Irish culture.<sup>36</sup> As ID74 records: "My daughter stands up and says 'I am Irish' and she's as English as the day is long, but she is Irish in her mind, from what I've given from my heritage." **(ID74)** Here we see a clear indication that individuals decide who can and who can not be Irish from the safety of their own standpoint. Whilst it is permissible in the United States for third, fourth and fifth generation people to adopt an Irish identity, in Britain such an approach does not appear possible.

The notion of hierarchies of Irishness is further illustrated in relation to two specific phenomena. The first relates to the question of the Irishness of Republic of Ireland international footballers. The second to the use of 'Plastic Paddy' as a term of derision within Irish communities in Britain.

### ***The Republic of Ireland Football Team***

Whenever a Republic of Ireland football team takes to the field there are snide comments about the ethnic credentials of a number of those donning a green jersey.<sup>37</sup> Focus has centred on those who were born in Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester etc. who are confronted with repeated references to their place of birth and a forceful questioning of their identity. The subtext being: are they really Irish? These are often accompanied by the suggestion that many only opt to declare for Ireland because they are not good enough to play for England! There is no recognition within such analyses that these players opt to play for the Republic of Ireland because they see themselves as 'Irish'. Rather they are depicted as footballing mercenaries.

This questioning of the authenticity of its players and in particular the content of an internet article which accused the Republic of Ireland of being the 'top poachers' of international football for picking 'British-born' players, led the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) to offer the following rebuttal:

*"Ireland has suffered from emigration for well over 150 years now and the reality is that a small nation is always likely to see its young people head off to Britain, Australia, the US, Europe and Asia for work. Most of these people end up spending their lives in the countries they move to, that doesn't stop them from being Irish. This also does not prevent them from having the right to raise their children as Irish*

*too, just because they don't speak with an Irish accent doesn't mean that they aren't entitled to consider themselves Irish.*"<sup>38</sup>

This is supported by ID27 who states: "that's the mentality of people who don't remember their history." **(ID27)**

The questions regarding the authenticity and Irishness of Irish professional footballers reflects the wider suspicion faced by other Irish people who were born outside Ireland. This is symbolically embodied by those individuals who gather in Irish community centres to support the Republic of Ireland team. These include those who were born in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Britain, 'White Irish', 'Black Irish', male and female, young and old, thus reflecting the diversity of Irish communities throughout the diaspora. These individuals collectively fail Norman Tebbit's 'Cricket Test', by professing their support for the Republic of Ireland.

### ***'The Plastic Paddy'***

The emergence, visibility and audibility of a new generation of Irish people, increasingly drawn from those who were born in England, has sponsored a widespread questioning of who can and cannot be Irish. Here are a large group of people who were born outside Ireland, have, in the main not lived there, do not possess Irish accents, yet claim to be Irish. This prompts the suspicion of sections of British society, Irish society and within Irish communities in England.

There are innumerable examples of disparaging comments being made about individuals who were born in England, yet have the ungrateful audacity to identify as 'Irish'. For example, a report in the Wolverhampton 'Express and Star' newspaper responding to Birmingham City Council's decision to recognise the Irish as an ethnic

community commented that: "Seventy thousand Brummies are to be turned into an ethnic minority – because mum or dad came from Ireland."<sup>39</sup>

This questioning also emanates from within Irish society, with an extreme example being an incident in which a London-born Republic of Ireland football supporter was attacked by a 'born in Ireland' fan, who argued that he should be supporting England.<sup>40</sup>

As Hickman affirms, this reflect some of the wider experiences in Ireland of those who were born in Britain:

*"These childhood visits for many second-generation Irish, however, were often also occasions when they experienced the Irish 'denial of diaspora'; encountering a firmly territorial definition of Irish within which no one born in Coventry or Luton was included."*<sup>41</sup>

I argue that, whilst the reaction of British and Irish society is of prime significance for this research, it is the reaction of established Irish communities in England that most severely affects these individuals. The sight of Birmingham-born Irish people articulating an Irish identity leads some to suggest that these individuals are merely aspiring to be Irish in order to gain some sort of ethnic credibility. These 'wannabes' are commonly and derogatorily termed: 'Plastic Paddies'. A 'Plastic Paddy' is someone who claims to be Irish, but as the term 'plastic' implies, they are essentially fake and therefore merely pretending to be Irish. They are frequently accused of over-exaggerating their Irishness in an attempt to establish their ethnic credentials. Interestingly, the notion of the 'Plastic Paddy' also implies that there is something called the authentic Irish person.

The use of the term 'Plastic Paddy' has potentially damaging repercussions for members of the current research population. It means that those individuals who attempt to articulate an Irish identity are tainted by the suggestion that they are not really Irish! This makes it increasingly difficult for individuals to publicly articulate an Irish identity, even to those within their own communities. Unlike the criticism endured from elements within wider society, here the individuals are being criticised by those that they perceive to be their own! The boundaries of Irishness are being policed: "it appears that we Irish now have our own self-proclaimed 'master race' which decides who is Irish and who is not."<sup>42</sup>

The 'Plastic Paddy' debates have largely been conducted through the letters page of 'The Irish Post' newspaper, which has seen a stream of correspondence from individuals who were born in the Republic of Ireland questioning the identity of those who were born in England. These in turn have prompted responses from 'second generation' readers and their allies. A recent contribution came from a reader who had been born in Ireland and had become tired with the discussion around the needs and concerns of the next generation stated: "In the last few weeks an ever increasing amount of The Irish Post has been taken up with problems concerning English-born people with Irish parents. If this is to continue may I suggest you rename your paper 'The Second-Generation Irish Post'."<sup>43</sup>

The response solicited: "Irishness is a feeling that comes from within – the awareness of who you are as a person and where you are from. The geography of my birth has given me a duality of life experience, not a lesser entitlement to my ancestry."<sup>44</sup>

This reflects the concerns of other members of the research population: "I have never been able to regard myself as being English. I was born in England, but my



race is Irish, a distinction lost on the self-appointed guardians of Irish culture and identity on both sides of the Irish Sea."<sup>45</sup>

Another correspondent responding to the aforementioned assault upon a 'second-generation Irish' football fan by a fellow fan, argues that:

*"If a second-generation Irish player walked into a bar after a game, he would be feted with handshakes and requests for autographs. If followed by a second-generation fan, the latter is liable to be questioned as to his/her identity and their reasons for being there."*<sup>46</sup>

The respondent rationalises such responses by pointing an accusatory finger:

*"One submits much of the blame for the accent/birth prejudice rests with the state's attitude to emigration. Having actively encouraged emigration for 'the good of the nation' how can Irish-born people then claim that the offspring of these emigrants are not Irish?"*<sup>47</sup>

### ***(5.vii) The Effects of this Questioning***

The negative conceptualisation of those who are born in Birmingham and choose to adopt an Irish identity is likely to have profound consequences for the individual's identity and psychological state. As an Irish Post correspondent points out to those who question the identity of 'Second-generation Irish' people: "Can you not see that by these actions, you are running down the Irish in our eyes and driving us away from our heritage."<sup>48</sup>

The responses of those who have their identity questioned is likely to vary. For some, their reaction will be to shrug off criticism and adopt an Irish identity with

renewed confidence. This is demonstrated by ID27's reaction to a heckler whilst performing on stage in an Irish venue in Birmingham. He was approached by a member of the audience who accused her/him of affecting an Irish accent: "you're just plastic aren't you". Unfortunately for the questioner the microphone captured the latter sentiments for the whole auditorium to hear. The respondent's simple response: "I'm plastic and I'm proud!" **(ID27)** His verdict now: "His problem, not mine". **(ID27)**

This is echoed by Horgan, who in response to the accusation that such individuals only adopt an Irish identity, because it is somehow 'trendy' explains: "I know my own truth, my own history and I know that my Irishness will remain with me long after the vagaries of fashion have changed. It couldn't really be any other way even if I wanted it to be." <sup>49</sup>

For other individuals, the affect of such questioning may mean that they eventually give in to the suggestions that they are not Irish by jettisoning their association with Ireland and Irish identity or alternatively giving their accusers the answers they expect.

For others still, the constant questioning may result in the individual never publicly identifying as Irish or only identifying as Irish once they have the confidence of those they encounter and are sure of their perception of them as Irish people. This, I suggest, is starkly demonstrated by the number of Birmingham-born Irish people who apply for jobs within Irish community organisations, yet fail to identify as Irish, despite their interests and previous experiences indicating a strong Irish identity. Such individuals frequently conceal their ethnic identity, even in situations where it should be advantageous, because they are unsure of the response of the person(s) who will conduct the selection process and their perceptions of them as Irish people. This is also heavily reflected in responses to the fieldwork.

The overall effect is likely to be that members of the research population are left feeling marginalised and cast adrift between the British and Irish communities.

This has implications for the long-term future of Irish communities in England, for the reality is that many of these individuals may see themselves as 'Irish', yet the reactions of other individuals may lead them to deny their ethnic identity and heritage. This also has specific consequences in relation to the 2001 Census, which, for the first time, includes an Irish category in the ethnic monitoring section. The reality is that having secured this milestone, many Irish people who were born in Birmingham may be reluctant to utilise the box!

One of the most profound results of such a negative debate is that it divides Irish communities throughout England, primarily along generational lines, leaving members of the research population to question why their 'fellow Irish' should adopt such a viewpoint:

*"I wonder do people realise how much of an insult, us British-born Irish regard the term 'plastic paddy' and all its associations with fraud and pretence. To be second-class as well as second-generation among the people with whom we share so much as we can from each other."<sup>50</sup>*

### ***(5.viii) Conclusions***

The experience of Birmingham-born 'Irish' people demonstrates the relationship between the processes of self-identification and socialisation. The individual may be assured in the knowledge of their own identity, yet is then subjected to a questioning of this identity from three different angles; from within wider British society; Irish society and most disappointingly from within their own Irish communities.

This means that regardless of how we label ourselves, we are simultaneously labelled by other elements within society. Members of the research population may label themselves as Irish, yet, despite their protestations, they may be labelled as British by others within British and Irish societies.<sup>51</sup> This reaction may then lead the individual to re-evaluate their identity to take account of these responses. It may also lead a substantial proportion to reject or conceal a sense of Irishness.

A crucial role within these processes of internal and external definition is played by the dominant grouping within society. In the case of the Irish in Birmingham, this role is occupied by the 'indigenous' British population. In order to fully understand the nature of Irish identity in Birmingham a considerable focus must be placed upon the role of this grouping in relation to the formation of Irish identity.

The next two chapters concentrate on the role of the British in shaping Irish identity, contemporaneously and historically in the construction of images of Irish people in the period since 1171.

### ***References***

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Nine for a fuller discussion of the issue of disclosure

<sup>2</sup> Heslinga, Dr. M. W. The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide – A Contribution to the study of Regionalism in the British Isles, 1979, pp.69-71 offers a discussion of the characters and mutual attitudes of 'Northerners' and 'Southerners'

<sup>3</sup> Gray, T. 'St Patrick's People: A New look at the Irish', 1997, p.218

<sup>4</sup> Horgan, J. Cub Scout of the Celtic Tiger (Column), The Irish Post, 18/03/00, p.28

<sup>5</sup> Horgan, J. Cub Scout of the Celtic Tiger (Column), The Irish Post, 18/03/00, p.28

<sup>6</sup> Gray, B. 1997, p.211, Akenson, D. H. 1996, pp.214-215, 'Attitude to Emigration is to Blame', Letter to The Post, M. MacCrimhtháinn, Hornsey, London, The Irish Post, 8 March 1997, p.12

<sup>7</sup> Hickman, M. Denying the Diaspora, The Irish Post, 13/05/00, p.15

<sup>8</sup> Akenson, D. H. 1996, p.189

<sup>9</sup> Akenson, D. H. 1996, p.5

<sup>10</sup> Brah, A. Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities, 1996, p.181

<sup>11</sup> Brah, A. 1996, p.192, Cohen, R. Global Diasporas: An Introduction, 1997, p.27

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- <sup>12</sup> Cohen, R. 1997, p.27
- <sup>13</sup> Hickman, M. 2000, p.15
- <sup>14</sup> Brah, A. 1996, p.181
- <sup>15</sup> Brah, A. Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities, 1996, p.181
- <sup>16</sup> O'Toole, F. 1994, p.18
- <sup>17</sup> Irish Post Soundbites Patricia Hartnett, Irish Post, 27/04/96
- <sup>18</sup> Gray, B. 1997, p.220
- <sup>19</sup> Brah, A. 1996, p.183
- <sup>20</sup> Brah, A. 1996, p.183
- <sup>21</sup> Brah, A. 1996, p.183
- <sup>22</sup> Brah, A. 1996, p.183
- <sup>23</sup> Brah, A. 1996, p.183
- <sup>24</sup> Gray, B. 1997, p.211
- <sup>25</sup> Akenson, D. H. 1996, McCabe, J. A Story of Two Worlds, 1993, O'Connor, T. H. The Boston Irish: A Political History, 1995, O' Farrell, P. How Irish was New Zealand? Irish Studies Review, No.9, 1994, pp.25-30, O' Hanlon, R, The New Irish Americans, 1998, O' Sullivan, P. (ed.), Irish Women and Irish Migration, Irish World Wide History, Heritage, Identity Series, vol. 4, 1995, O' Sullivan, P. (ed.), The Irish in the New Communities, Irish World Wide History, Heritage, Identity Series, vol. 2, 1992, Watts, J.F. The Immigrant Experience: The Irish Americans, 1996
- <sup>26</sup> Bolger, D. (ed) Ireland in Exile: Irish Writers Abroad, 1993, Bolger, D. Father's Music, 1998, Bolger, D. The Journey Home, 1990, Casey, M. Over The Water, 1987, Collins, M. Emerald Underground, 1998, Croghan, D. Paddy Irishman, Paddy Englishman and Paddy...? 1999, Hughes, E. Lancelot's Position: The Fiction of Irish Britain, in E. Lee, A R (ed.), Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction, 1995, pp.142-160, Keane, J. B. The Contractors, 1993, MacGill, P. Moleskin Joe, 1983, McCrory, M. Bleeding Sinners, 1989, McCrory, M. The Water's Edge and Other Stories, 1985, Murphy, T. Plays: One, 1992, O'Connor, J. Introduction to Ireland in Exile: Irish Writers Abroad, Bolger, D. (ed.) 1993
- <sup>27</sup> Mary Robinson's tenure as the President of Ireland did much to publicise the role of the Irish Diaspora within Irish Society with Mrs Robinson famously applauding the contribution of the Irish overseas to the Irish society over the last two centuries. Similarly, RTE, the national broadcaster, commissioned and scheduled a series entitled 'The Irish Empire', offering for the first time a documentary account of the life of the Irish Diaspora to a terrestrial TV audience in the Republic of Ireland – 'The Irish Empire', The Irish Post, 20 November 1999.
- <sup>28</sup> Gray, B. 1997, p.223

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<sup>29</sup> 'Plastic Paddy' is derogatory term used to describe Irish people who were born outside Ireland. It infers that the individual concerned is not really Irish, that he or she is a fake and that they are merely pretending to be Irish.

<sup>30</sup> O'Hanlon, R. 1998, p.142

<sup>31</sup> Scully, J. 1997, p.392

<sup>32</sup> Scully, J. 1997, p.392

<sup>33</sup> Toman, S. An Irish Accent or Vocal Chameleon, Irish Post, 29/04/00, p.13

<sup>34</sup> 'Asking Siobhan to try to be herself', Ms Murphy, Harrow, Letter to the Irish post, 13/05/00, p.10

<sup>35</sup> K. O'Connor, 1972, p.169. Jackson, J. 1963, p.160

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter Nine for further discussion

<sup>37</sup> Radio Five, Mellor Nil, Irish Post, 10/07/99, p.9

<sup>38</sup> Football Association of Ireland (FAI), Press Release quoted in Irish Post, 20/03/99, p.47

<sup>39</sup> Leake, J. Irish to be Ethnic Group, Express and Star, 27/09/91

<sup>40</sup> Irish Post, 01/03/97 and Follow-up letter, Irish Post, 22/03/97

<sup>41</sup> Hickman, M. Denying the Diaspora, Irish Post, 13/05/00, p.15

<sup>42</sup> Letter, Kennedy, P. C. Irish Post, 10/04/99, p.12

<sup>43</sup> Letter, Doyle, B. Irish Post, 22/04/00, p.10

<sup>44</sup> Letter, Cummings, P. Irish Post, 13/05/00, p.10

<sup>45</sup> Letter, Cummings, P. Irish Post, 13/05/00, p.10

<sup>46</sup> Letter, MacCrimhtháinn, M. Irish Post, 08/03/97, p.12

<sup>47</sup> Letter, MacCrimhtháinn, M. Irish Post, 08/03/97, p.12

<sup>48</sup> Letter, English, J. P. Irish Post, 23/11/95, p.12

<sup>49</sup> Horgan', J. Cub Scout of the Celtic Tiger, 18/03/00, Irish Post, p.28

<sup>50</sup> Letter, P. Cummings, Irish Post, 13 May 2000, p.10

<sup>51</sup> See discussion in Chapter Six

## ***Chapter Six: 'Dominant Group Ethnicity' - British Identity and its significance for the Irish Identity in Birmingham***

### ***(6.i) Introduction***

Having explored the relationship between 'internal' and 'external' definitions of identity and applied this to the experiences of the research population, I now focus on a specific aspect of this process, the role of British identity in shaping Irish identity, historically and at the onset of the twenty-first century.

The intersection of British and Irish history over an eight hundred-year period means that any examination of Irish identity in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century must include a substantial consideration of the nature of British identity and of the ways in which British identity has profoundly influenced the shaping of Irish identity in Ireland, Britain and the wider Diaspora.

This chapter also explores important theoretical frameworks that aid analysis of the relationship between British and Irish identity. I examine Doane's work on 'Dominant Group Ethnicity' in the United States to probe its significance for the case of the research population.<sup>1</sup> This then provides the basis for a discussion of the question of British identity and its effects upon the formulation of Irish ethnic identities within English society. I scrutinise a number of principal spheres of influence; the Anglo-Irish historical relationship; historical inferiorisation of the Irish, political situation in Northern Ireland and the notion that British identity is experiencing a number of 'crises'. At each stage, I relate the main theoretical arguments to the case of the research population. I conclude by exploring the experience of the research population of duality, the notion of 'belonging' to two different societies.

### ***(6.ii) 'Dominant Group Ethnicity'***

Doane offers a critique of ethnic relations in the United States, which posits that a discourse has been constructed that concentrates on the ethnicity of minority groupings within American society, with little or no examination of the identity of the dominant grouping.

Doane defines a 'dominant ethnic grouping' as:

*"the ethnic group in a society that exercises power to create and maintain a pattern of economic, political, and institutional advantage, which in turn results in the unequal (disproportionately beneficial to the dominant group) distribution to the dominant group."*<sup>2</sup>

Doane outlines two principal hypotheses. Firstly, that: "the dominant group has appropriated the mainstream".<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the identity and cultural attributes of the dominant grouping are assumed to represent the norm within society. These are backed by the weight of the law, government and media, thus ensuring that the position of the dominant group is maintained.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, the fact that the dominant group is assumed to represent the norm means that there is little need for the grouping to assert its ethnic identity and thus ethnic identity is perceived to be 'less salient' to dominant group members. This results in, to quote Doane: "the taken-for-grantedness" or "non-consciousness of a dominant group identity".

These twin hypotheses lead Doane to the conclusion that the dominant grouping is often perceived to exist without an ethnic identity, as a "residual non-minority".

Doane forwards that academia has been instrumental in underpinning this perception by its failure to examine: "the characteristics of the dominant group itself and



particularly the nature of dominant group ethnicity and with its continued preoccupation with examinations of minority group ethnicity."<sup>5</sup>

In Britain, the weight of academic research has explored the identity, culture and experiences of 'Black' and 'Asian' migration in the post-war period.<sup>6</sup> The significance of the black-white dichotomy has led not only to the overlooking of 'white British' ethnicity, but also that of predominantly 'white' migrant groupings such as the Irish.<sup>7</sup> In order to construct an image of Britain as mono-ethnic in the period prior to post-war migration of Black and Asian people, the Irish were incorporated into the wider 'white' grouping, for the purposes of social and political expediency.<sup>8</sup>

The Irish, as the largest net migrant grouping in post-war British society, do not sit comfortably alongside notions of a mono-ethnic society. Thus, the Irish, as Hickman records, have been constructed and depicted in contradictory ways. Firstly, as 'white' and therefore easily incorporated into the wider 'white' British grouping in response to inward migration of 'Black' and 'Asian' migrants. Secondly, they have been portrayed as thick, violent and untrustworthy outsiders.<sup>9</sup>

This means that Irish people in Britain occupy an uncertain position, neither fully accepted and integrated, nor wholly rejected by British society. At different points, the Irish have experienced the positives of acceptance and the negativity of rejection, particularly in the wake of Republican bombing campaigns in Britain.

I argue that this contradiction has resulted in a situation, which differs, radically from the experiences of other migrant groups within post-war British society. Whilst other groups have sought to integrate into wider British society and to play down differences, often in the face of considerable hostility, for the Irish, the problem, as a predominantly 'white' grouping, has been to emphasise their distinctiveness. The issue for many Irish people has not been how to assimilate more fully into British society, but rather how to avoid total absorption.<sup>10</sup>

The concentration upon notions of ethnic minority status, implies that ethnicity has nothing to do with the majority grouping. There has been little exploration of the ethnicity of the white British grouping, indeed there is a widely held assumption that ethnicity is bound up in notions of non-white minorities, the 'exotic other' and in many cases negative experiences.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that the dominant grouping within British society has never been allowed to come to terms with its own ethnic status has made it extremely difficult to forward Irish demands as an ethnic grouping. This is demonstrated by the problems Irish community organisations encounter in trying to sell ethnic minority status to the community itself. The popular association between ethnicity and notions of marginalisation has created a reluctance within sections of the community.<sup>12</sup> As an Irish Post correspondent records: "We are fed up with being classed as an ethnic minority as if we were Third World people."<sup>13</sup> This sentiment is echoed by another reader who believes: "Irish people should leave ethnic minority issues to true ethnic minorities."<sup>14</sup>

To overcome this situation we need to revisit stage one in the analysis of ethnicity, to establish that all groups that draw on notions of ethnicity as a basis of their identity are ethnic groups. This applies equally to majority groupings as it does to minority communities, to 'Black', 'Asian', 'Irish' and 'white British' communities. As Doane records: "there is no such thing as 'non-ethnicity'".<sup>15</sup> Unless we start from this premise, we cannot begin to fully understand the nature of ethnicity and ethnic identities in modern society. We not only need to understand the nature of identity amongst minority groupings such as the Irish; we must also explore the identity of the dominant grouping.

Before applying Doane's work to the situation of the Irish in Birmingham, it is important to underline the qualification that Doane himself offers in relation to his model:

*"the existence of a system of ethnic stratification does not mean that all dominant group members enjoy higher social, economic, and political status: it merely means that dominant group members are overrepresented at higher levels and that dominant group membership constitutes an advantage (or at least an absence of ethnic and racial obstacles) in inter group resource competition."*<sup>16</sup>

Membership of the dominant grouping does not guarantee advantage; it does however increase the likelihood of securing advantage.

### ***(6.iii) Dominant Group Ethnicity: The British Context***

Within the context of British society, the dominant ethnic grouping is notionally the 'British' grouping. However, as I argue more fully at a later point in this chapter, notions of British identity have been dominated by one component of the British aggregate: the English. Despite this domination, I believe it is still useful to begin by talking about notions of Britishness, because at different points and in the face of different situations, for example in times of war and conflict, it is a sense of Britishness which is drawn to the fore. Temporarily leaving aside such problematic considerations, for the purposes of analysis, the British grouping, can be crudely applied to those who were born in Britain or who are able to trace their recent ancestry to Britain. Despite the multi-ethnic nature of centuries of inward migration, the borders of British identity have been heavily policed in order to characterise pre-war British society as predominantly 'white'.<sup>17</sup> It is often characterised in mono-

ethnic terms, a fact reflected in the institutional structures of Britain. As Doane records, the dominant group in appropriating the mainstream effectively controls societal institutions such as the media, judiciary and civil service. These help to reinforce the position and identity of the dominant grouping and as a consequence to simultaneously disadvantage and discriminate against those that lie outside.

In Britain, one can certainly construct an argument that posits that the media, judiciary, civil service and other institutional structures serve to privilege the position of dominant group members and disadvantage other groupings within society. In modern democratic societies, the legal system and judiciary as the arbiter and protector of rights should, in the interests of justice, equality and opportunity, reflect the diversity of the society it serves. Membership should reflect the gender, class, age and ethnic composition of that society. In Britain, the reality is that the judiciary is dominated by upper middle class, middle aged and older, white males. This in itself is a serious issue, however there is a more pressing concern. The fact that the judiciary is controlled by male members of the dominant grouping, inevitably privileges the position of members of the dominant grouping, particularly male members and disadvantages members of other groups. This is reflected in the protracted effort to secure justice in the Stephen Lawrence case and numerous miscarriage of justice cases involving 'Black', 'Asian' and Irish people.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, the electronic media is widely seen to reflect the attitudes, opinions and tastes of the dominant group within British society.<sup>19</sup> Schedules are dominated by programmes made by, presented by and appealing to 'white British' people. Programmes that target minority communities are seen as an additional part of the responsibilities of broadcasters.<sup>20</sup> From news broadcasts that rarely report issues and events that are salient to 'minority' communities, to soap operas that contain few cast members from ethnic minority communities and have frequently negatively

portrayed these communities. For example, 'Eastenders' broadcast a series of episodes set in Ireland in 1997 which provoked widespread criticism from within the Irish community in Britain and the Irish Government, as they reinforced innumerable stereotypes of Irish people and of Ireland.<sup>21</sup> Similar portrayals can be seen in respect of the Irish and other ethnic communities.<sup>22</sup> It is implicit that such action undoubtedly simultaneously reinforces the position and esteem of the majority grouping.

As Doane records, the supportive role of institutions within society means that members of the majority grouping do not need to assert their identity. Doane echoes McIntosh and Frankenburg in arguing that the benefits associated with dominant group ethnic association mean that: "dominant ethnic identity is less likely to be perceived as salient by group members, for advantages are often less evident than obstacles."<sup>23</sup> The reality is that for "dominant group members, ethnicity does not generally intrude upon day-to day experience and that the privileges of group membership are taken for granted."<sup>24</sup>

If one supports Doane's assertion, then it is not surprising that members of the dominant grouping often question the motives of members of minority communities that seek to emphasise their ethnic differences. One frequently hears statements to the effect of: "Why do the Irish have to make a song and dance about it, they are the same as us, they are just trying to be different, we do not make a fuss, so why should they?" The demands of Irish community groups for recognition of Irish ethnic status are propelled by the experiences of thousands of Irish people who access such agencies every year to complain about inadequate, negative or insensitive treatment from mainstream agencies.<sup>25</sup> Such reactions to Irish claims to ethnic group status mirror the responses of mainstream society to the wider subject of ethnicity and specific funding of projects and services for different ethnic

groupings. In response, I turn to Smith, who states that: "Those whose identities are rarely questioned and who have never known exile or subjugation of the land and the culture, have little need to trace their roots in order to establish a unique and recognisable identity."<sup>26</sup>

Doane makes two further points which are crucial to this thesis. Firstly, that whilst dominant group ethnic identity may be less important to its members, less visible and even 'hidden', this is not to say that it does not exist.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the very existence of minority ethnic groupings necessitates the existence of majority ethnic groupings within society. That there are ethnic minorities within society is an admission that there is an 'ethnic majority'.<sup>28</sup>

Implicit throughout Doane's work is the notion that the 'ethnic majority' plays a key role in defining the identity of minority communities. It is to this that I now turn.

#### ***(6.iv) British Identity and its influence on Irish Identity in Britain***

The Anglo-Irish relationship is a long and complex phenomena, with the paths of the two islands intersecting at so many points in history that it is inevitable that each should continue to influence the other in so many respects, including identity.

Attempts to develop a distinct Irish identity, particularly during the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth century, have been heavily influenced by the spectre of English and British identity. In exploring this influence I concentrate on four inter-related aspects; the Irish experience as colonial subjects; inferiorisation of Irish people, both in Ireland and elsewhere; the on-going situation in Northern Ireland; and finally the perceived current 'crises' of British identity.

### ***(a) Colonialism and Empire***

As other authors have recorded, Ireland was the first component of a global empire. It became: "a sort of political and social laboratory in which, parabolically, the English could test their most new fangled ideas"<sup>29</sup>

From the Norman intervention in 1170, Ireland was controlled, to a lesser or greater degree, not from Dublin, but from London. For over seven hundred years the essence of Irish culture, its language, art and literature were suppressed and overlaid with English equivalents in sustained processes of cultural homogenisation and its economy subordinated to the interests of the Empire.<sup>30</sup> This relationship led to the uneven economic development of the two countries and institutionalisation of Irish dependency upon its nearest neighbour, which manifested itself both in respect of economic activity and the culture of emigration, which was established in Ireland from the earliest periods of interaction.

The net effect is that many of the features of Irish life have been heavily shaped by English/British influences. Indeed, many of the institutional structures bequeathed to the post-independence Republic of Ireland replicated British institutions.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the best efforts of Irish nationalists, the first language of the majority of Irish society remains English. Indeed, the British influence has ensured that the Irish cultural forms have been fervently forwarded as symbols of Ireland, Irish nationalism and Irishness.<sup>32</sup> This is most notably demonstrated in the orchestrated reprise of Irish culture by successive Dublin governments since 1922.<sup>33</sup>

The colonial nature of the British-Irish relationship has ensured that their interaction has been conducted within a hierarchy in which the coloniser is placed at the top and the colonised at the bottom.<sup>34</sup>

A number of authors argue that within the context of the Anglo-Irish relationship Irish and British national identities have been constructed and maintained in

opposition to each other.<sup>35</sup> In reference to such arguments, it is worth recalling Hogg and Abrams' assertion that: "Categories do not exist in isolation. A category is only such in contrast with another."<sup>36</sup>

Kiberd offers a different perspective, suggesting that rather than viewing the relationship as oppositional, the two nations and identities have served to compliment and reinforce one another, paraphrasing Céitinn he states: "the Irish were not foils to the English so much as mirrors."<sup>37</sup> He concludes: "If England had never existed, the Irish would have been rather lonely. Each nation badly needed the other, for the purpose of defining itself."<sup>38</sup>

Whether one views this relationship as oppositional or complementary, it can scarcely be doubted that the two poles profoundly influence one another. It would also appear self-evident that British identity will have had a far greater influence upon the construction of Irish identity than vice-versa. British identity has, through colonialism, involvement in Northern Ireland and Irish settlement in Britain, played a pivotal role in the construction of Irish identity, in both Ireland and in Britain. This is witnessed in the historical Anglicisation of Irish society, dominance of the English language and the direct experience of Irish migrants within British society.

By contrast, British identity has been shaped by Britain's interaction with innumerable other societies across the world, rather than simply its relationship with Ireland and the Irish. Consequently, at almost all stages of this relationship one can clearly see the potential influence of British elements upon Irish identity. As Cornell and Hartmann acknowledge: "Although an ethnic group is self-consciously ethnic, its self-consciousness often has its source in outsiders."<sup>39</sup> As I argue in Chapter Five, the identity that other's assign to us can be a powerful force in shaping our own self-concepts. It is to one aspect of this, the inferiorisation of Irish people, that I now turn.



### ***(b) Inferiorisation***

Inferiorisation of the native population represents one of the central pillars of colonial ideology.<sup>40</sup> It is a two-way process whereby the coloniser is exalted as a model specimen, intellectually, physically and racially, while the colonised are inferiorised and socially undermined.<sup>41</sup> This process has profound consequences for both British and Irish identity, with the latter being undermined by the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, which reaffirm positive notions of Britishness. As Kiberd records: "an identity was proposed for the natives, which cast them as foils to the occupiers, thereby creating the impression that those who composed it had always been sure of their own national character."<sup>42</sup>

Here, once again, we witness the dual nature of the processes of categorisation. The coloniser, in labelling the colonised population, not only makes profound statements about this group, but also sends out clear messages about the dominant grouping. Norman, English and British constructions of the Irish and Irish identity undoubtedly say as much about the Norman, English and British, as they do about the character of the Irish themselves. As Kiberd records: "Through many centuries, Ireland was pressed into service as a foil to set off English virtues, as a laboratory in which to conduct experiments, and as a fantasy-land in which to meet fairies and monsters."<sup>43</sup> Through these processes: Irishness became everything that Britishness was not!

There are two distinct, yet interconnected strands within the process of inferiorisation of the Irish. Firstly, the political and strategic action of the Norman, English and British authorities in Ireland and secondly, the images of Ireland and the Irish, which were disseminated to Norman, English and British society at different stages.

### ***(i) Political and Strategic Action***

Contrary to modern conceptualisations, Irish history does not begin with the arrival of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman-Welsh. Ireland has a history extending back to before 8000B.C.<sup>44</sup> As Kee records: "There have been 800 years of attention from London, but there were some 8000 years of human life in Ireland before that."<sup>45</sup>

In the intervening centuries, a series of peoples, including Gaelic Celts and Norse settlers brought with them and developed aspects of a culture and civilisation that was equal to anything in existence elsewhere in Europe, creating a: "triumphant fusion of Christianity with the Gaelic world".<sup>46</sup> Accounts of pre-Norman Ireland depict a vibrant society, advanced by contemporary European standards, embodying an egalitarian approach to gender relations and a coherent set of Brehon Laws.<sup>47</sup>

The Norman intervention immediately altered this pattern of development. Whilst it would be difficult to sustain an argument that there has been a deliberate, unbroken policy of inferiorisation and incorporation adopted by successive English and latterly British governments over many centuries, there are a series of isolated events spanning more than eight hundred years that, when considered in accumulation, indicate a sustained undermining of Irish identity, culture and customs.

This is initially witnessed in the Norman leadership's attempts to retain the distinctive nature of Norman identity and customs amongst their brethren in Ireland, amidst fears of the degenerate ways of the Irish influencing and tainting those they encountered:

*"so strongly has the pest of treachery grown and put in roots here; so natural through long usage have bad habits become; to such an extent are habits influenced by one's associates, and he who touches pitch will be defiled by it; that foreigners*

*coming to this country almost inevitably are contaminated by this, as it were, inborn vice of the country – a vice that is most contagious.”<sup>48</sup>*

The response to this process culminated almost two centuries later in the institution of the Statutes of Kilkenny. The Statutes sought to preserve notions of Englishness and prevent wholesale assimilation, citing the supremacy of English Law, outlawed adoption of Irish customs, clothing, culture and language by English subjects and prohibited intermarriage. The Statutes forward Irish culture as degenerate, corrupting and a threat to the sanctity of Englishness and English culture.<sup>49</sup>

Echoes of the Statutes are witnessed in the House of Tudor’s attempts to reassert its influence over Ireland, through legislation such as ‘Poynings’ Law’ and the Acts of Supremacy and Conformity, which sought to ensure loyalty through political compliance, land ownership and religious affiliation.<sup>50</sup> Whilst the Reformation failed to replicate its success in Ireland, its true significance lies in the messages it sent out regarding the imposition of an English Church, its significance for the Irish language and the fact that it placed the religious dimension to the fore within future social relations in Ireland.

Similarly, the Plantation of vast tracts of lands in Ulster set the pattern for coming centuries, as through the Cromwellian period, Penal Laws and pre-famine era, the Irish/Catholic population were deprived of land.<sup>51</sup> As John Stuart Mill records:

*“According to a well known computation, the whole land of the island had been confiscated three times over. Part had been taken to enrich powerful Englishmen and their Irish adherents; part to form the endowment of a hostile hierarchy; the rest had been given away to English and Scotch colonists, who held, and were intended to hold it, as a garrison against the Irish.”<sup>52</sup>*

This ensured that: "The essential difference between Catholic and Protestant was one between native dispossessed and alien possessor."<sup>53</sup>

The Penal Laws placed further restrictions upon the Catholic population, debarring individuals from public office, the army and the bar. Roman Catholics were also prevented from buying land, obtaining mortgages or leasing land for a period in excess of 31 years.<sup>54</sup> As Mitchell records, the Penal Laws: "took charge of every Catholic from his cradle, and attended him to his grave".<sup>55</sup>

The subjugation of Irish people and the Roman Catholic Church was underpinned by the underdevelopment of the Irish economy, with wide-ranging restrictions placed upon the Irish wool and cattle industries.<sup>56</sup> The absence of industrialisation, other than in the north-east of the island, meant that Ireland was overly dependent upon the agricultural sector and ensured the institutionalised nature of emigration within Irish society.

As I demonstrate, there are a series of events, from the initial Norman intervention, through to the Penal Laws and economic under-development that served to undermine Irish identity, culture and societal formations and an explicit or implicit acknowledgement that English and British conceptions of identity, culture and societal relationships are unquestionably superior to Irish ones. Limitations of time prevent further exploration of this notion, although I suggest that this is also witnessed in subsequent events such as the Act of Union, 'the Great Famine', Home Rule and wider aspects of twentieth century relations.<sup>57</sup>

### ***(ii) Depictions of the Irish***

The undermining of the Irish has been augmented by the images which were disseminated to those within the coloniser's own society in order to rationalise and

legitimate the state's involvement in Ireland and the wider Empire. Invariably, this has taken the form of the construction of the colonial subject as intellectually, morally and often racially inferior and thus incapable of self-government.<sup>58</sup> These processes of inferiorisation occur both in the homeland and the society in which migrants settle. I argue that it is possible to trace the negative representations of Irish people through the course of the relationship, with the same images recurring in English Literature and media from the twelfth through to twenty-first century.

### ***Gerald of Wales***

The first images of Irish people were disseminated to English society by Giraldus through his 'History and Topography of Ireland' and 'Conquest of Ireland'.<sup>59</sup> Giraldus, who describes the Irish as "a filthy people, wallowing in vice", identifies five primary negative behavioural and character traits inherent within the Irish population.<sup>60</sup>

Firstly, Giraldus characterises the Irish as a barbarous people with a natural propensity for violence:

*"From an old and evil custom they always carry an axe in their hand as if it were a staff. In this way, if they have a feeling for evil, they can the more quickly give it effect. Wherever they go they drag this along with them. When they see the opportunity, and the occasion presents itself, this weapon has not been unsheathed as a sword, or bent as a bow, or poised as a spear. Without further preparation, beyond being raised a little, it inflicts a mortal blow."<sup>61</sup>*

Secondly, tied to this barbarity is Irish treachery: "Moreover, above all other peoples they always practise treachery. When they give their word to anyone, they do not

keep it. They do not blush or fear to violate every day the bond of their pledge and oath given to others".<sup>62</sup> He concludes: "they are neither strong in war, nor reliable in peace."<sup>63</sup>

Thirdly, in relation to religion, the Irish are cast as inherently superstitious:

*"the people and clergy of both Wales and Ireland have a great reverence for bells that can be carried about, and staffs belonging to the saints, and made of gold and silver, or bronze, and curved at upper ends. So much so that they fear to swear or perjure themselves in making oaths on these, much more than they do on swearing the gospels."*<sup>64</sup>

Fourthly, the Irish are classified as idle: "given only to leisure, and devoted only to laziness, they think that the greatest pleasure is not to work, and the greatest wealth is to enjoy liberty."<sup>65</sup> As evidence, he highlights the Irish failure to take advantage of their land's natural bounty:

*"How few kinds of fruit-bearing trees are grown here! The nature of the soil is not to be blamed, but rather the want of industry on the part of the cultivator. He is too lazy to plant the foreign types of trees that would grow very well here."*<sup>66</sup>

Finally, the Irish are portrayed as backward and primitive: "a wild and inhospitable people. They live on beasts only and live like beasts. They have not progressed at all from the primitive habits of pastoral living." He damningly concludes: "although they are fully endowed with natural gifts, their external characteristics of beard and dress, and internal cultivation of mind, are so barbarous that they cannot be said to

have any culture."<sup>67</sup> Giralduſ even goes ſo far as to accuſe the native Irifh of engaging in beſtiality, a further mark of its degradation as a people.<sup>68</sup>

In theſe five characteriſations one can witneſs Giralduſ' dual ſtrategy. Firſtly, to underpin and juſtify Norman involvement in Ireland and ſecondly, to undermine Irifh ſociety and character. It is in execution of the latter that the former is at leaſt partially achieved. The inevitable concluſion being that the Irifh are inherently incapable of ſelf-government.

Giralduſ' depictions represent the firſt layer of inferioriſation of the Irifh, to this were added more than eight centuries of interaction. This is embodied in the exiſtence of 'the Pale', whereby thoſe within its confines were by implication decent and civiliſed, whiſt thoſe beyond its bounds were naturally caſt as unciviliſed, ſavage and barbarous.<sup>69</sup> Curtis exhorts: "The Engliſh coloniſts juſtified their actions by arguing that the Irifh were culturally inferior to themſelves, and that the Engliſh would civiliſe them."<sup>70</sup>

Giralduſ profoundly influences later characteriſations of the Irifh, with his work, which was republiſhed in 1600s, echoing through Tudor and Stuart literature, including the work of Campion, Stanyhurſt, Spenſer and Hume who collectively poſition the Irifh as culturally inferior, unciviliſed, religious deviants, backward and barbarous; the very characteristics aſcribed by Giralduſ centuries earlier.<sup>71</sup> Hume ſtates:

*"The Irifh from the beginning of time had been buried in the moſt profound barbariſm and ignorance; and as they were never conquered or invaded by the Romans, from whom all the weſtern world derived its civility, they continued ſtill in the moſt rude ſtate of ſociety, and were diſtinguiſhed by thoſe vices alone to which human nature, not tamed by education, or reſtrained by laws, is for ever ſubject."<sup>72</sup>*

Pinkerton echoes that Irish Celts “have been savages since the world began, and will forever (be) savages; mere radical savages, not yet advanced even to the state of barbarism.”<sup>73</sup>

This can then be traced through to the nineteenth century scientific racism, which saw the inferiorisation of the Irish, principally via satirical publications, such as *Punch* and the ‘Penny weeklies’, which brought such depictions to wider audiences.<sup>74</sup>

At different junctures, the Irish were also racially classified according to skull shape, jaw angle, hair colour, skin complexion and facial features.<sup>75</sup> Curtis identifies Beddoe’s ‘Index of Nigrescence’, which calculated, on the basis of skin colour, eye shade and hair type, a measure of “the ratio of Black, Brown and red, as well as fair-headed persons in any given region.” The conclusion, the categorisation of the ‘Africanoid Celts’, emphasising an Irish link with Africa.<sup>76</sup>

Subsequently, the Irish were simianised, leading satirists to attribute ape-like features, characteristics and mannerisms to their Irish subjects.<sup>77</sup> This led *Punch* to proclaim the discovery of the “missing link, between apes and humankind”:

*“A creature manifestly between the Gorilla and the Negro is to be met with in some of the lowest districts of London and Liverpool by adventurous explorers. It comes from Ireland, whence it has contrived to migrate; it belongs in fact to a tribe of Irish savages: the lowest species of the Irish Yahoo. When conversing with its kind it talks a sort of gibberish. It is, moreover, a climbing animal, and may sometimes be seen ascending a ladder laden with a hod of bricks.”<sup>78</sup>*



Punch offers a significant clarification: "The somewhat superior ability of the Irish Yahoo to utter articulate sounds, may suffice to prove that it is a development, and not, as some imagine, a degeneration of the Gorilla."<sup>79</sup>

As Curtis states: "Paddy had devolved, not evolved, from a primitive peasant to an unruly Caliban, thence to a 'white Negro', and finally he arrived at the lowest conceivable level of the gorilla and the orang-utan."<sup>80</sup>

The nineteenth century feminisation, racialisation and 'simianisation' represents merely the latest vehicle, with which to undermine the Irish character and perpetuate stereotypes of Irish deviance. As Kiberd states:

*"Victorian imperialists attributed to the Irish all those emotions and impulses which a harsh mercantile code had led them to suppress in themselves. Thus, if John Bull was industrious and reliable, Paddy was held to be indolent and contrary; if the former was mature and rational, the latter must be unstable and emotional."*<sup>81</sup>

Once again the Irish were deemed to be incapable of rational thought, civil behaviour and ultimately self-government. The self-perpetuating nature of this proposition ensured that Irish demands for greater autonomy prompted cruder characterisations.<sup>82</sup>

These images were later recycled for use in reference to other groups: "In centuries to come, English colonisers in India or Africa would impute to the 'Gunga Dins' and 'Fuzzie-Wuzzies' those same traits already attributed to the Irish."<sup>83</sup>

The transferability of stereotypes underlines the need of the coloniser to justify its presence in alien societies and to sell the colonial adventure to its population at 'home'. By characterising colonial subjects as feckless and incapable of self-government, the colonial power could portray itself to it as a benevolent benefactor.

As Curtis concludes, Victorian depictions of the Irish offer clear echoes of Giraldus' five characterisations: "No Victorian versed in physionomical theory and artistic practice could possibly miss the physical or biological degradation engraved in Paddy's features, which echo much older fears voiced by Gerald of Wales..."<sup>84</sup>

Historical conceptions of the Irish can similarly be traced through to the twenty-first century, specifically in relation to three contemporary conceptions; those relating to alcohol misuse, violence and 'backwardness'.

### ***Contemporary Images of the Irish: Alcohol Misuse***

The association made between generations of Irish people, invariably men, and alcohol remains one of the most persistent stereotypes of the Irish.

This is reflected in late twentieth century media images of Irish people. From the 'drunk' in the bar in Hitchcock's 'The Birds' to the alcoholic wife-beater, Trevor Jordache in Brookside to the drunken, violent buffoon Jim McDonald in 'Coronation Street'.<sup>85</sup> All stress the apparent link, in the minds of scriptwriters and directors, between the Irish and alcohol misuse.

Similarly, a report regarding public house pricing policies, in that bastion of English liberalism 'The Guardian' records that:

*"Some of the cheapest prices in greater London are at JD Wetherspoon's 198 pubs, with Scotch beer at £1.05, Theakston's bitter at £1.25, Fosters at £1.85 and Guinness, consistently overpriced in London, at £1.70. The clientele, however, is not London's most glamorous. At the company's giant pub in a converted cinema in north Islington, the regulars are mainly elderly Irishmen."*<sup>86</sup>

The Irish are not only highlighted as a visible grouping, but also as an undesirable element within society.

The arguments of those who link alcohol misuse and the Irish are strengthened by the numbers of older Irish men accessing agencies for support around alcohol misuse.<sup>87</sup> However, this grouping represent an extremely marginalised and isolated grouping for whom alcohol is the most widely available coping mechanism.<sup>88</sup> Whilst acknowledging the position of alcohol as a socially acceptable drug within modern Irish society, I support Scully's assertion that the Irish are no more alcohol obsessed than their nearest neighbours:

*"The Irish at home drink less per capita than the British or North Americans but the 'natural' label pre-empts their presence in the receiving societies prescribing their 'race' as inherent drinkers and their 'natural' abode as the pub."*<sup>89</sup>

Assumptions regarding alcohol and the Irish directly impact upon the lives and perceptions of Irish people within British society.

### ***Contemporary Images of the Irish: Violent***

Giraldus' historical stereotypes of the Irish predisposition for violence continue to be reproduced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland has replanted the link between Irish people and violence within the minds of many people in Britain. This is most visibly demonstrated in an Evening Standard cartoon from 1982, which depicted a mock poster for a film entitled 'The Irish' with the strap-line: "The Ultimate in Psychopathic Horror" and a cast comprising the major Northern Ireland paramilitary organisations.<sup>90</sup> This cartoon

reprised the simianised image of the 'Irish' and as Curtis states: "carried much the same baggage of social Darwinism and degradation theory."<sup>91</sup>

As Curtis counsels, Northern Ireland has frequently been portrayed as an internal dispute between warring 'Irish' factions: "With rare exceptions, they have presented British politicians and soldiers as long-suffering 'peace-keepers', caught up in a war not of their own making between violent and irrational Irish people."<sup>92</sup> In support, Curtis reproduces a cartoon depicting a British 'squaddie' with hands outstretched attempting to keep an Ulster Catholic and an Ulster Protestant youth apart as stones rain down on his head. Curtis dismisses the notion of Britain as an independent arbiter:

*"There is a fundamental paradox. Britain has one of the most violent and uncivilised histories of any European country, yet the orthodox view is that the English are both non-violent and civilised, and that it is the people whom Britain has oppressed who are violent and uncivilised."*<sup>93</sup>

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) has augmented the association between the Irish and violence as it gives the police rights to arrest and detain for seven days any individual who is 'suspected' of involvement in terrorist activity and the Home Secretary the right to exclude such individuals from Britain: "without trial or explanation".<sup>94</sup> Between November 1974 and December 1991, 7,052 people were detained under the PTA, 6,097 were released without charge.<sup>95</sup> This has prompted suggestions that the PTA has been used to control Irish people in Britain, thus creating a 'Suspect Community'.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, it is claimed that British security services

monitored all electronic communications between Britain and Ireland for at least a decade up until January 1999.<sup>97</sup>

Such action has sent out the message that Irish people in Britain should be treated with suspicion. Consequently, one women's magazine asked its readers: "Are you living next door to a terrorist?" The article asked whether the individual next door had an Irish accent, whether he or she lived alone? Such attitudes help to foster suspicion of Irish people in Britain, producing a situation in which 'Irish' and 'IRA' are used interchangeably.<sup>98</sup>

### ***Contemporary Images of the Irish: 'Backward'***

The depictions of the Irish as 'drunkards' and as 'violent' have perhaps only been surpassed by those portraying the Irish as 'thick'. The modern incarnation is the 'Irish joke', which Curtis traces to the books of 'Irish Bulls', such as 'Teagueland jests and Bog Witticisms' from 1749:

*"The Bulls and witticisms that too frequently drop from Irish mouths have made them the discourse and entertainment of all sorts of companies. Nothing more recommends Teague and his countrymen than their natural stupidity."*<sup>99</sup>

From this earliest incarnation, images contained in Irish jokes have remained constant across a number of centuries. For example, Curtis traces the continuing phenomena of the 'Letter from an Irish Mother' from 1795 to the present day.<sup>100</sup>

In the 1970s, the anti-Irish 'joke' and other examples of prejudicial 'humour' made it onto the mainstream stage with the advent of 'The Comedians' TV Series.<sup>101</sup> Anti-Irish jokes were the second most frequent 'ethnic jokes', after anti-Pakistani ones.<sup>102</sup>

Their institutionalised position within British society is also demonstrated by a Birmingham radio station's decision to 'celebrate' St Patrick's Day 1999 by asking its listeners to call in with their favourite 'Irish jokes'.<sup>103</sup>

The 'Irish joke' has been heavily critiqued by commentators such as Leach, who positions the 'jokes' in relation to Northern Ireland, as a tool to reaffirm the position of the English:

*"For English people, ill-informed or misinformed about the continuing war in Ireland, anti-Irish jokes provide a way of laughing off a situation which they find frustrating and fail to understand. And anti-Irish jokes also provide a kind of misplaced reassurance that John Bull, after all, knows best."*<sup>104</sup>

The authors and publishing houses responsible for their proliferation have been quick to defend the 'jokes'. A Publishers note to one collection contends:

*"When we first published 'The World's Best Irish Jokes' there was a terrible howl of anguish from those who felt that we were being "racist" in raising a laugh at the antics and verbal contortions of our beloved Irish cousins and forebears."*<sup>105</sup>

*It continues:*

*Of course, we are aware that there are many vicious and unsympathetic jokes told against the Irish (and against most other large ethnic groups) but we don't find such jokes funny at all and our humble attempt was intended to be affectionate in mood. We mainly related stories of Irish folk who were warm, gregarious, big-hearted,*

*boozy, genuinely pious, ingenious and, in a weird kind of way, displaying the kind of instinctive creativity characteristic of the intuitive lateral thinker.*<sup>106</sup>

Even in attempting to justify its publication, the publishers merely reproduce further stereotypes that litter the book. The book is made up of tales and jokes that depict the Irish as thick, heavy drinkers and violent fanatics. The author, who lampoons the Irish for being thick, fails to number the pages of the volume.

For Curtis, anti-Irish 'jokes' are merely reinterpretations of universal jokes that set out to undermine the subject and enhance the position of the teller:

*"Jokes identical in theme – and often in content – to anti-Irish jokes are told by Americans against Poles, by Glaswegians against 'teuchters' – country bumpkins, and by Irish people against countryfolk of Kerry. In each case, the group who tell the jokes are asserting their superiority and bolstering their own sense of self-importance."*<sup>107</sup>

Whilst one no longer sees simianised and racialised images of Irish people, negative stereotypical images of the Irish still pervade within British society. These merely replicate depictions of the Irish offered by individuals from Giraldus forward. I therefore contend that a set of images have been constructed of the Irish and passed from generation to generation, informing and expanding over the centuries. Their accumulative effect impacts fundamentally upon Irish society and the Diaspora and continues to resonant in the twenty-first century. This is illustrated by the comments of David Pleat, football manager and media 'pundit', who, whilst commenting on the atmosphere during the 'Euro 96' football finals in England said: "This competition has a certain South American feel – I know that sounds a bit

Irish".<sup>108</sup> Pleat ironically uses the term 'Irish' to indicate the contradictory and foolish nature of his comment. Pleat's use of the term 'Irish' to connote 'thickness' and 'stupidity' is one that is replicated within so many quarters within British society.

For many within British society, the term 'Irish' remains inextricably bound up in notions of stupidity, heavy drinking and violence. Perpetuation of age-old stereotypes mean that Irish people are expected to personify these negative characterisations and it creates confusion when Irish people fail to conform to them. For example, BBC golf correspondent, Tony Adamson speaking on Radio Four was asked to offer an insight into the emerging Irish golfer Padraic Harrington, he proclaimed: "he is somewhat unusual for an Irishman, he is a tee-totaller."<sup>109</sup>

The perpetuation of stereotypical images shapes the way in which Irish people are viewed and treated within society and helps to underpin a number of forms of verbal abuse and discrimination. The repetitious use of 'Irish jokes', references to Irish stupidity and alcohol use in various settings can seriously undermine the position of Irish individuals and communities. A number of successful cases of discrimination have been brought by Irish people, including Trevor McAuley, who sued his employer after persistently being referred to as an 'Irish Bastard' and subjected to constant repetition of 'Irish jokes'.<sup>110</sup> The irony in this case is that McAuley is a Northern Ireland Protestant who labels himself 'British'.

Similarly, connections are frequently made between Irish individuals and the political situation in Northern Ireland, specifically with the IRA.<sup>111</sup> In one case, a college lecturer successfully sued his employer after being repeatedly verbally abused by colleagues who labelled him a 'terrorist' and nicknamed him 'Gerry Adams'.<sup>112</sup>

As Hickman and Walter argue, such incidents are particularly prevalent in the wake of IRA attacks on British cities: "Pre-existing prejudices were applied with renewed



intensity to all Irish people, the vast majority of whom had no connection or sympathy with the violent incidents."<sup>113</sup>

These problems have been exacerbated by the aforementioned Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) which has helped to further regulate the lives of Irish people: "casting them all as potential terrorists."<sup>114</sup> Buckley suggests that:

*"The PTA's conflation of Irish ethnicity in Britain with involvement in the IRA reflected a complete misunderstanding of the complexities of the Irish identity there and of the political allegiances of the majority of the Irish population in Britain."*<sup>115</sup>

The connection is such that the authors of a Metropolitan Police training handbook felt it necessary to state that:

*"All Irish people ARE NOT (their emphasis) either members of, nor do they support the activities of the IRA. When IRA terrorists are active in London there is often a backlash against the Irish community. It is our duty to protect the innocent just as much as it is our duty to catch offenders."*<sup>116</sup>

O'Flynn et al. offer case-studies of harassment of Irish people, detailing verbal abuse, physical attacks, graffiti and excrement being placed through letterboxes.<sup>117</sup>

Perhaps most damningly they outline institutional inaction in failing to deal with claims of harassment made by Irish people and specifically the failure to treat attacks on Irish people as 'racially motivated'.<sup>118</sup>

This is echoed by the report 'Discrimination and the Irish Community', commissioned by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) which uncovered "the extent to which deep-seated anti-Irish stereotypes form part of a more general response to Irish people."<sup>119</sup> Research participants: "revealed a catalogue of demeaning treatment which built into a cumulative picture of 'normal' levels of harassment, punctuated by a number of more frightening and aggressive acts."<sup>120</sup> The report posits that this sends out a key message: "Irish people are constantly reminded that they are not entitled to an equal place in British society. On the other hand, they are not seen as sufficiently different for this racism to be acknowledged and afforded some level of protection."<sup>121</sup>

The burden carried by the Irish as an 'other' within British society was undoubtedly partially relieved by Britain's wider attention to its Empire.<sup>122</sup> This does not mean that the attentions of British society completely moved from Ireland and the Irish. As Curtis records of the CRE report: "Such reports should serve as forceful reminders that the 'thick' Paddy image refused to die with the Victorians and is alive, if not exactly well, today."<sup>123</sup>

During the 1980s and 1990s, Britain experienced sustained bouts of 'political correctness', with attempts to re-educate elements within British society and alter attitudes towards minority groups. This has resulted in, if not seismic shifts in such attitudes, then a realisation that overtly prejudicial treatment of ethnic and sexual minorities is unacceptable. This, I argue, has led to a reduction in the acceptability of public expressions of anti-Black and anti-Asian sentiments. This, however, does not mean that the underlying attitudes have changed but rather that individuals know not to make such comments in particular settings. However, these often cosmetic changes have not affected all groups equally. It remains acceptable within areas of British society to express anti-Irish sentiments, at a time when it is no

longer acceptable to express the same sentiments about other ethnic groups.<sup>124</sup> It would appear that whilst many individuals have got the message that, regardless of one's personal beliefs and prejudices, one should not tell 'anti-Black' and 'anti-Asian' jokes, it would appear that the Irish people, Travellers and lesbians, gay and bisexual men remain 'fair game'! Consequently, there is now a two-tier approach to anti-discriminatory behaviour.

The findings of the survey phase support those found by Hickman and Walter, O'Flynn et al and others in relation to harassment. 52.8% of 'Second generation Irish' respondents record that they have experienced abuse as a result of their Irish heritage. Many of these related to incidents at school, offering a further indication of the ingrained nature of anti-Irish sentiments within sections of British society. It would appear that some individuals receive anti-Irish attitudes and sentiments from their parents and the media. Alternatively, this may also be indicative of the messages that individuals do not receive about Ireland and the Irish.

The other central issue is that these negative representations have frequently been the over-riding images of the Irish. This is not to suggest that there are no positive images or stereotypes of the Irish. Traditionally, Ireland has been renowned for its literary heritage, with the works of Yeats, Joyce, Wilde, Beckett and a multitude of other writers receiving worldwide acclaim. More recently, musicians and popstars such as U2, Van Morrison, Boyzone and Westlife have provided further positive depictions of Ireland and Irish culture, providing potential role models. The 1990s saw an unprecedented period of buoyancy for Ireland, with the economic prosperity of the Celtic Tiger coinciding with the work of Roddy Doyle, success of the Republic of Ireland football team, popularity of Irish theme pubs and the emergence of Dublin as a major destinations for weekend trips from Britain. These positive images of Ireland, Irish culture and Irish people are likely to have improved the perception of

Irish people within British society. However, I contend that these positive images and depictions are only beginning to counterbalance the negative images and stereotypes of the Irish which I concentrated on during much of this chapter. As I have argued, the stereotypes of the Irish as violent, drunkards and backwards remain evident within contemporary British society. I further contend that the persistence of these images within the media and elsewhere has a greater impact upon the current research population, that the positive images are more than undermined by the negative portrayals.

It is also important to record that much of the positivity which I have outlined relates directly to Ireland as a country and to Irish society in Ireland. However, there has been little recognition of the presence and contribution of Irish people in society. As Garry records: "the only references to the Irish in the archives in Birmingham Central library related to the pub bombings and a 'tinker encampment' in Sparkbrook in the 1960s!"<sup>125</sup>

The marginalisation of Irish culture and tradition is witnessed across a range of fields including culture, education and social services. The absence of an Irish dimension negates a potential opportunity to counterbalance the negative representations of the Irish people, to recognise their contribution to society and to normalise the Irish presence in Britain.

It is only in the 1990s that this imbalance has begun to be addressed with the slow, but increasing inclusion of Irish categories within ethnic monitoring systems and funding of Irish specific projects within the statutory and independent sectors.

The failure to transmit positive images through educational and other institutions has implications for Irish people in England:

*"This means that Irishness appears in British media only sporadically and problematically. Officially, Irishness is something which happens elsewhere and which periodically irrupts into British consciousness at times when Irishness, viewed like some troublesome, quirky child, is seen to demand a response from the weary, perplexed, benign elder of Britishness."*<sup>126</sup>

### ***(c) Northern Ireland***

The third arena, in which British identity has influenced the construction of Irish identity, is in respect of the political situation in Northern Ireland. This draws upon the legacy of both colonialism and widespread inferiorisation of Irish people in British society. As I articulate elsewhere, the struggle for and against Irish independence, both before and after the 1922 Partition, has led to the construction of the Irish as an essentially violent grouping. The actions of groups from the Fenians of the nineteenth century through to the present day have led many within British society to the conclusion that the 'Irish' (of both hues) are inexorably drawn to violence.<sup>127</sup> This has a dramatic effect upon the wider Irish population in Britain and Ireland who do not support the activities of a minority in Northern Ireland, yet who are consistently labelled because of their ethnicity or perceived ethnicity.<sup>128</sup>

The Anglo-Irish relationship has ensured that the term 'British' is inevitably bound up in the remembered excesses of colonialism. In addition, the fact that one of the main protagonists in the conflict in Northern Ireland, the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist communities, lay claim to a British identity means that there are problems for sections of the research population in adopting such a label. To identify oneself as 'British' may be viewed, in some quarters, as sending out signals of one's sympathies or allegiances in Northern Ireland. I propose that many Irish people in

Britain find it profoundly problematic to adopt a British national identity alongside an Irish national label.

The significance of this for the research population lies in the fact that British influence upon Ireland and Irish people did not end with the establishment of the 26 county Free State and later the Republic of Ireland, for as Kiberd states: "the effects of cultural dependency remained palpable long after the formal withdrawal of the British military: it was less easy to decolonise the mind than the territory."<sup>129</sup>

The three areas that I have thus far highlighted in order to understand the role and influence of British identity in shaping Irish identity all stress the strength of Britain and British identity. There is however one further arena in which Britain has shaped the formation of Irish identity which reflects a weakening of notions of Britishness.<sup>130</sup>

#### ***(d) 'Crises of Britishness'***

British identity has historically sought to incorporate the disparate national elements that have, at different points, formed the political entity that is the United Kingdom. The national identities and aspirations of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland have at different times been subjugated to those of the larger British project. This involved not only the overlaying of various national interests, but also the invention of a rationale for this process.

Colley argues that British identity was consolidated around a number of phenomena: Protestantism, conflict with France and in more recent times other elements within Western Europe, 'commercial supremacy' and 'imperial hegemony'.<sup>131</sup> Within this framework British identity was constructed in recognition of Britain's relationship with a series of 'others': principally Catholicism, France and its colonial underlings.

There has recently been a suggestion that Britain is experiencing profound crises of identity. The emphasis here is on crises rather than a singular crisis, because British identity is being undermined from a number of standpoints.

Firstly, the failure of British identity to fully incorporate and overlay its constituent parts and to curb the aspirations of these groupings. Despite concerted attempts to construct a coherent and unified identity incorporating the disparate peoples, these have ultimately failed to contrive such an identity that is universally acceptable to all those it seeks to incorporate.<sup>132</sup> As Colley stresses, despite the emergence of the new unified British identity, the internal identities have not dissolved:

*"The sense of a common identity here did not come into being, then, because of an integration and homogenisation of disparate cultures. Instead Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all in response to conflict with the Other."*<sup>133</sup>

Internal divisions within Britain have simply not disappeared. They have remained a constant feature within British society, re-emerging in the 1990s in the campaigns for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly in 1999.

Secondly, Hall argues that Britishness has, over a number of centuries, simply been Englishness writ-large and imposed upon Scotland, Wales and Ireland.<sup>134</sup> British history, culture and consequently, identity are simply the English variants extended, yet little changed, to take account of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: "The national character of Britain was defined by the English, because England was the centre of power and hub of the Empire."<sup>135</sup> This is also reflected in the national identity of Britain. Thus rather than creating an identity that embraces and

encompasses the disparate elements, British identity merely reflects one sectional interest. As Hall states:

*"British' culture still does not consist of an equal partnership between the component cultures of the UK, but of the effective hegemony of 'English', a southern-based culture which represents itself as the essential British culture, over Scottish, Welsh and Irish and, indeed, other regional cultures."*<sup>136</sup>

Nowhere is English dominance more in evidence than within the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). In 1995, only 2% of its programmes were made in Scotland. The vast majority of the national broadcaster's output emanated from the English regions and primarily from London.<sup>137</sup>

English dominance has arguably created a confusion between English and British national identities, which appears to pervade much of British society. This is evidenced in the flying of the Union flag at English national sporting and cultural events. To this end an Euro 2000 supplement, produced by Loaded magazine, included an image of England football captain, Alan Shearer wearing an England football shirt and waving a Union Flag.<sup>138</sup>

The interchangeability of 'English' and 'British' is also reflected in a report of a football match in which Aston Villa fielded a team consisting of ten English-born players, at a time when other teams were increasingly relying upon foreign imports, journalist, Peter White experiences great difficulty determining whether this is a victory for the English, British or both. He offers the headline: "British legion leave Gregory licking lips" and subsequently reports that: "John Gregory is reminiscent of a patriotic Englishman who eagerly devours his T-bone steak before declaring 'British is best'."<sup>139</sup> The intermittent references to British are somewhat confusing.



This confusion is also to be found in academia. If one turns to the index of Solomos' 'Race and Racism in Britain', under 'Britishness', one is advised to look under 'Englishness'.<sup>140</sup>

There would appear to be considerable uncertainty as to where the dividing line between 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' falls, if indeed there is one. I propose that this uncertainty means that the Scottish and Welsh largely fail to embrace a British identity, because they view it as merely a byword for Englishness. The reality is that they look to their own national affiliations for expressions of their identity.

Meanwhile the English are likely to view the things that one would acknowledge as British as being English and when they refer to themselves as such, merely refer to the essentially English aspects of Britishness. As Kearney states, the English: "jibe at the term 'British' and accept it with some reluctance. If they do use it they do so as a shorthand for 'English'."<sup>141</sup>

The re-emergence of Scottish and Welsh nationalism in the latter decades of the twentieth century has sparked a potential crisis of 'Englishness'.<sup>142</sup> For many years the English, as the dominant grouping within the British venture, have been able to take for granted their own sense of identity: 'Britishness' was 'Englishness' and 'Englishness' was 'Britishness'. Now the English are left puzzling what exactly 'Englishness' is. As Walvin states, it is: "uncommon to consider what is meant by 'England' and the 'English'. It is widely assumed that the basic human stock of England – white Caucasian – has been a settled and relatively homogeneous stock since time immemorial."<sup>143</sup> The English are having to re-learn what it means to be English.

The confusion that exists amongst the English themselves may have been transmitted to those outside England, but not to those most closely affected: "Britain and England are still spoken of interchangeably by the English and by foreigners, but

never by the Scots, Welsh and Irish. Indeed the Celts defensively constructed a Celtic character that was the exact opposite of the English."<sup>144</sup>

Recent developments have largely rendered the terms 'British' and 'Britishness' as essentially cosmetic labels that individuals adopt and cast aside as required, yet whose meaning and significance, few fully understand. The reality is that the only group within Britain which claims the 'British' label with any conviction are the Protestant/Loyalist/Unionist population in Northern Ireland.<sup>145</sup> This, as I have outlined, is likely to make it extremely problematic for those Irish people in Britain, who are drawn from Catholic/Nationalist/Republican tradition to adopt such an identity. Or could it simply be that many Irish people in Britain fail to adopt a British national label as part of their identity, because they share much of the confusion and misgivings of their fellow citizens about what it means to be British? After all, why should they buy into a phenomenon that few fully understand?

Thirdly, the loss of Empire has impacted upon notions of Britishness. At the height of the British Empire there was undoubtedly an immense sense of national pride in the ability of a small island off the coast of 'mainland' Europe to control approximately one third of the world's territory. However, I support Colley's assertion that the end of the Empire signalled the effective demise of a coherent sense of British identity for the majority of people in Britain.<sup>146</sup>

Just as British identity was largely constructed within the context of Britain's colonial experiment and through its dialogue with nations in areas as diverse as Ireland, Africa and Asia, the loss of Empire and Britain's diminishing role as a player on the world stage has led to a major re-appraisal of what Britishness means.<sup>147</sup> As Colley states: "The Other in the shape of militant Catholicism, or a hostile continental European power, or an exotic overseas empire is no longer available to make Britons feel that by contrast – they have an identity in common."<sup>148</sup>

For some within British society, the term 'British' is inexplicably bound up in its imperial past and to identify oneself as 'British' is to align oneself with the imperial past.<sup>149</sup> Such images and memories may mean that the problematic nature of 'Britishness' leaves individuals looking for other notions of identity and other less contentious labels. Once again I argue that this is particularly significant for Irish people in Britain.

The final factor that has led to a significant re-appraisal of British identity has been the inward migration and settlement of 'Black' and 'Asian' people in the post-war period. Although this was by no means the first instance of the immigration of 'Black' and 'Asian' migrants to Britain, it is however the largest such settlement. The original migrants and successive generations have settled permanently and adopted new identities that incorporate British national elements, i.e. 'Black-British'. As Hall records, migration has challenged and expanded notions of Britishness: "the sense of what it is to be British can never again have the old confidence and surety."<sup>150</sup> Solomos confirms: "There is no longer, if there ever was, any certainty about the meaning of 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' in the current political environment."<sup>151</sup>

#### ***(6.v) The Effects for the Subject Population – Duality***

The position of members of the subject population in relation to the depictions of Irish people, widespread absence of re-affirming positive images and experiences of verbal and physical abuse within British and Irish society underlines their experiences of duality; the reality of being products of two societies and potentially perceiving themselves to owe allegiance to these different collectivities. Having been born in Britain, they may look to an external source: Ireland, for their ethnic heritage and many of their cultural references.

I argue that the true significance of this duality is located in how the individual comes to terms with these competing demands, and the ways in which they acknowledge and express this duality within their personal identity.

Anthias, writing of the experience of 'second generation Greek Cypriots' in Britain, argues that the question of identity most strongly affects those who came to Britain as children and those who were born in Britain.<sup>152</sup> This is equally applicable to the case of the Irish in Birmingham. Many of those who arrived from Ireland in the post-war period are likely, as a result of their life-experiences in Ireland, to be reasonably secure in their identity as Irish people or, have alternatively sought to assimilate themselves into British society. It is for their offspring and subsequent generations that the real questions of identity are posed. This grouping must reconcile their current realities with their ethnic heritage and forge an identity that mediates these demands. Their reality is often to be "caught between two cultures".<sup>153</sup> As Anthias states: "Even where British-born Cypriots may speak English better than Greek... they are still ethnic in the sense that their social relations are bound by the form of economic and social adaptation of their families within a new and exclusionary social context."<sup>154</sup>

This notion of duality is played out across the Irish diaspora:

*"Irish families in every part of Britain have aunts and uncles all over the place. It's what comes of being immigrants. It's what comes of being people who live in two places all the time, one where they work and rear children and one that they carry in their heads and imaginations. The one that's always called home. The one their names give away. The one that is the ever present other country."*<sup>155</sup>

Whilst Horgan asserts that a notion of duality is a reality for all members of the research population, it is likely to affect members of this grouping in very different ways. This is evidenced in the individual's experience of growing up in a migrant family and potentially a wider Irish community, within British society. The individual, as a child of one or both migrant parents, is likely to be aware of this reality from an early age. However, they may not similarly be aware that there is another world out there, in which some people do not share these connections. **(ID45)**

I argue that, regardless of one's experiences or situation, there will be some semblance of duality within the lives of all members of the research grouping. Their experiences of, and reactions to this duality can be crucial to their decisions regarding the labels of identity they adopt. Such decisions are likely to be shaped by their experiences of the two broad communities at the centre of this duality.

It is, of course, important to record that there are two clear manifestations of this duality, those relating to positive and negative duality.

Positive duality is witnessed in the individual's access to two cultures. The individual is born and socialised within British society, with the associated benefits of access to the local host society's education system, media and cultural forms. (S)he is simultaneously socialised within the family and the wider ethnic community. (S)he may thus gain access to a range of Irish (and other) cultural forms, including religious tuition, music, language, arts and sports. This allows the individual, through a range of mechanisms, to gain access to two or more distinct cultures and to draw upon the most desirable elements of each, and incorporate these into their own sense of identity.

The positive side of duality is further expressed in the fact that, having been born and socialised within the host society, the individual may be able to negotiate that

society's internal political and social structures with greater confidence than their parents' generation. Whilst, the migrant may, initially at least, occupy a peripheral role within the host society, the succeeding generation is likely to be better equipped with the necessary social and linguistic skills to negotiate potential social barriers. For such individuals, who gain access to different cultures, the processes of identity formation and general socialisation may mean that they will receive positive reinforcements from different aspects of their heritage, leading them to perceive that they enjoy "the best of both worlds". Their hybrid existence and experience of Irish and British cultures may mean that they emerge with a settled appreciation of both dimensions, which complement, rather than conflict with one another and leaves them free to acknowledge and integrate aspects of both within their personal identities.

However, the very variables that lie at the roots of this perceived positivity are also responsible for some of the potential negative consequences for the individual.

Having access to two ethnic cultures can also lead to the individual receiving very different and even conflicting messages about these societies and cultures. Individuals must learn to negotiate the differences "between parental modes of behaviour and those at school".<sup>156</sup> Many of this grouping are likely to grow up within settings with access to Irish members of their family, Irish cultural activities and to Ireland itself, primarily through the provision of family holidays. These are likely to give the individual a positive sense of her/his connections with Ireland, effectively anchoring the position of such phenomena.

Then, at the age of five years, the individual begins to attend a local school, interacting with other pupils, becoming more fully involved in the life of the local community. As I have previously intimated, within this setting there are likely to be

few, if any references to Ireland and Irish culture, even in situations where there are considerable numbers of pupils from Irish families within the school.

These two processes run concurrently throughout the course of the individual's childhood and adolescence yet rarely impinge upon one another. This ensures that the individual is socialised within two distinctly different arenas, one Irish and the other British, and thus the two are never allowed to come together or to reinforce one another.

I argue that this approach, of separate, yet concurrent processes of informal and formal education means that the individual must make sense of a series of different and conflicting signals. This may ultimately leave a proportion of the research population feeling that they have to make a choice between the two cultures and identities. For some, this will mean that they embrace one tradition, whilst casting aside the other dimension of her/his heritage. This, as I record in Chapter Nine, is demonstrated by the respondents who allude to an either/or approach to the British and Irish national labels.<sup>157</sup> It is important to record that this is not the case for all members of the research population, as 48.9% of respondents select labels of identity which combine both British and Irish dimensions. Thus this choice would appear to be less significant for such individuals.

The relationship between the two cultures and societies that lie at the centre of this duality is crucial to the effects upon the individual and their identity. Where there are no problematic historical connections and an absence of negative stereotypes of these communities within the host society, it may be possible for the individual to draw upon elements within both cultures, with little or no conflict. Alternatively, where this occurs against the backdrop of a colonial relationship or a history of adversarial conflict, the outcome may be quite different.

For the Irish in Birmingham, there exists both a colonial connection with Britain and an accompanying history of centuries of conflict. The latter continues to resonate, most notably in relation to Northern Ireland. Such a context changes the dynamics of the potential relationship between the research population and elements within British society, ensuring that the messages the individual receives in different settings will not only be different, but often conflictual.

The oppositional nature of this relationship and the positioning of the individual within both societies may mean that, at various times and in different situations, (s)he is cast in the role of the 'Other' in relation to both and may ultimately never fully accepted or trusted in either. In Britain, they may be treated with suspicion because of their ethnic heritage, whilst in Ireland, they are derided as 'dirty rotten Brits' or 'the English cousins' because of their place of birth and the weight of eight hundred years of history. As Caroline Tierney of the Irish Generations Association states, people who were born in Britain are "Tired of having to explain that you can have a British accent and still be Irish."<sup>158</sup> The benefits of drawing upon two societies and cultures can be swiftly counterbalanced when one is treated with suspicion by elements within both societies. This manifests itself in the questioning which individuals experience within British and Irish societies, as explored in Chapter Five. This may result in the individual perceiving themselves as neither truly belonging within either community or society and of being 'doubly misunderstood'.<sup>159</sup> As Walter indicates: "Far from enjoying the 'best' therefore, they may experience the 'worst' of both worlds."<sup>160</sup>

The individual may also find her/himself having to defend her/himself against the criticisms of elements within both societies. When in Ireland, the individual, may be required to answer for British governmental action in Northern Ireland, whilst back in Birmingham they may be challenged about the activities of paramilitary



organisations. Once again, individuals may be placed in a situation in which they feel they have to make a choice between the two societies. Here we witness the impact of the historical relationship, for as Wilpert states:

*"the extensive differentiation which exists between the original labour recruiting countries and the sending countries, between former colonies and the metropole, or the less privileged centre and the periphery is such an integral part of the relationship between the two countries that it also permeates the relationship between the majority society and the immigrant minority."*<sup>161</sup>

This is stressed by those fieldwork respondents who feel compelled to choose between the 'British' and 'Irish' labels or felt that these represent polar identities.

The events surrounding the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings' add a further layer to this potential negativity. As I explore in Chapter Seven, 'the bombings' led the Irish community to adopt a lower profile and may have led the parents of members of the subject grouping to shield their children from exposure to anti-Irish sentiments, thus discouraging them from participating in Irish activities and edging them toward a more assimilationist approach. The bombings may also have discouraged individuals within the community from emerging to lead cultural organisations, thus restricting their availability within a given locality.

Similarly, the individuals' own experiences of anti-Irish sentiments, and those of their parents, may have discouraged the individual from identifying as Irish, for fear of provoking further resentment. Here we see two simple scenarios which demonstrate the potential affect of the Birmingham Pub Bombings upon the subject grouping. It should be noted that these merely represent possible examples. Further scenarios are explored in Chapter Nine. It would appear obvious from the centrality of the

'Birmingham Pub Bombings' within the experience of the post-war Irish community, that these events should impact upon the lives on the research population, affecting the processes of identity formation.

The reality of their duality can, as I have demonstrated, have profound consequences for the individual and their identity. The individual must negotiate the boundaries of this conflict, internalise the demands placed upon them, absorb these and reflect them within their identity. Where such conflict occurs, this can have profound psychological effects upon the individual. As Chambers suggests, the situation and reality of the modern day migrant is:

*"to acquire the habit of living between worlds, caught on a frontier that runs through your tongue, religion, music, dress, appearance and life. To come from elsewhere, from 'there' and not 'here', and hence to be simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside' the situation at hand, is to live at the intersections of histories and memories, experiencing both their preliminary dispersal and their subsequent translation into new, more extensive, arrangements along emerging routes."*<sup>162</sup>

I argue that this is not only the reality for migrants, but also for the succeeding generations. A significant section of the research population share the dilemma of living in one society, whilst looking back to another society for their ethnic heritage and points of reference. To quote Greeley's work on American society, the migrant and successive generations are faced with a profound dilemma:

*"The critical question becomes not one of choosing between the culture of origin, on the one hand, and the immigration and post-immigration experiences on the other,*

*but of asking how the interaction between the old world culture and the New World experiences shaped the phenomenon of American ethnic group cultures.*"<sup>163</sup>

They are effectively "caught between two cultures".<sup>164</sup> The individual has to face different directions, to give different responses to different people in different situations. As Anthias indicates in relation to 'Second generation' Cypriot identity in Britain, if asked in English, they say they are Greek, if asked in Greek, they say they are Cypriot.<sup>165</sup> Their lives become a negotiation between their two worlds, between new and old realities:

*"migrant(s) groups have to be seen as inserted within a total system of social relations encompassing the country of origin, the ethnic ecological base (and its ethnic, political and economic structures and networks) and the country of residence."*<sup>166</sup>

Even where the individual appears to take on whole-heartedly the ways, culture and modes of behaviour of the host society, this is likely to be done through the filter of their ethnic and cultural awareness as the children of migrants and as people of Irish heritage. As Chambers states:

*"It is to speak the languages – linguistic, literary, cultural, religious, musical – of the dominator, of the master, but always with a difference. Language is appropriated, taken apart, and then put back together with a new inflection, an unexpected accent."*<sup>167</sup>

This is also the case in situations in which the individual adopts an ethnic identity, it is always through the filter of experiences within the host society. Thus, as previously recorded, Irish identity will take radically different forms in different locations.<sup>168</sup>

Migrant communities, encompassing different generations, adapt their lifestyles to varying degrees in order to find new ways to express their ethnic culture and identity. It is through the acknowledgement of these twin points of reference that the individual makes sense of her/his own position in relation to both societies. Hall refers to this process as a 'translation':

*"Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely."*<sup>169</sup>

As I have argued, the duality of having been born in Britain, yet being a product of two societies, can have profound effects upon different individuals and their perceptions of their identity. For some, it will be possible to combine elements of both cultures and societies within their identity. For others the conflict this brings may mean that they jettison one or other aspect of their identity. Where this occurs, this may have profound psychological effects upon the individual.

The notion of duality is central to the experience of the subjects at the core of this research. As people who are born in Birmingham, with familial links to an ethnic grouping that has experienced colonialism at the hands of the host society, that has been heavily inferiorised within this relationship and experienced an uneasy

existence within local society in the wake of the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings', this duality can be extremely problematic.

For members of the research population, this notion of duality and the myriad of factors I have outlined during this chapter may have profoundly differing effects.

Firstly, the individual may receive no negative messages about Ireland, Irish people and Irishness and therefore is likely to be unaffected, thus leaving them able to embrace a form of Irish identity.

Secondly, the various factors may create a conflict between the messages the individual receives about Irishness at home and those available in schools, media and wider society. This leaves the individual effectively cast adrift between two societies.

Finally, the negative images and perpetuation of stereotypes of Irish peoples may mean that the individual rejects any sense of an Irish identity, at a conscious or sub-conscious level, with obvious consequences for their mental health. This is perhaps indicated by the significant percentage of the survey respondents who reported that they had experienced discrimination as a result of their Irish heritage/origins, yet choose not to label themselves as 'Irish'. Could it be that for some, the two factors are linked and that they jettisoned a sense of Irish identity in response to opposition from elements within society?

I argue that, whether an individual rejects, embraces or is ambivalent toward notions of Irish identity, their attitudes and actions in this respect are shaped by the Anglo-Irish historical relationship, construction of Irish people during this period and modern conceptions of age-old stereotypical images of Irish people. It is within this context that members of the subject population construct their identity. As Buckley states:

*"Just being an Irish person in Britain plunges Irish people there into a dramatisation of their identity because Britain has so thoroughly and problematically involved in the construction of what we know as Irishness and the Irish. Whenever an Irish person enters England, or when an English person enters Ireland, a hurricane of history is blowing on them"*<sup>170</sup>

Further fundamental British influence upon Irish identity is witnessed in the experience of the Irish communities in Britain. Consequently, Chapter Seven outlines the historical settlement of the Irish in Birmingham, principally in the period since 1939.

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<sup>130</sup> The measure of this is suggested by the number of newspaper articles which appeared during 1995-2000 which dealt with this question and specifically the relationship between British and the internal national identities. These include: Perryman, M. Forever Ingerland, Guardian, Section Two, 22/04/00, p.16. Marr, A. The New Battle of Britain - A Review of Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's Who do we think we are? The Observer, 30/04/00, p.4. Phillips, M. Jack Straw is About to Fight Racism, But What About the Miseries of Young White English People with No Sense of Identity, The Observer, 27/07/97. What Does It Mean To Be English, Guardian, Letters, 08/06/98, p.17. It's the Symbol of England's New National Pride and it's Made in Taiwan, The Observer, 28/06/98, p.4. Williams, H. Well at Least We Know Know Who We Are! The Observer, 06/08/00, p.27. United Kingdoms Need Freedoms To Choose, Guardian, 03/07/00, p.11. Toynbee, P. We Can Be English, Without Falling Into the Racist Trap, Guardian, 12/01/00, Falling Standard: Is it Time to Change the Union Jack, Guardian Section Two, 12/01/00, pp.2-3. Richards, J. The Way We Were, Guardian Section Two, 15/08/97, pp.2-3.

<sup>131</sup> Colley, L. 1996, p.6

<sup>132</sup> Colley, L. 1996, p.6

<sup>133</sup> Colley, L. 1996, p.6

<sup>134</sup> Hall, S. 1993, p.297, Kearney, H. Four Nations or One? in Crick, B. (ed.) National Identities: The Constitution of the United Kingdom, 1991, p.3

<sup>135</sup> Richards, J. 15/08/97, pp.2-3.

<sup>136</sup> Hall, S. 1993, p.297

<sup>137</sup> Pittock, M. G. H. Inventing and Resisting Ireland: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685-1789, 1997, p.6

<sup>138</sup> Ladbrokes, Euro 2000 – Betting Guide, London, 2000

<sup>139</sup> British Legion Leave Gregory Licking Lips Guardian Sports Section, 05/10/98, p.3

<sup>140</sup> Solomos, J. 1993, p.273. It is interesting that the opposite scenario, of Englishness being listed under Britishness would be perfectly permissible.

<sup>141</sup> Kearney, H. 1991, p.3

<sup>142</sup> Paxman, J. 1999, p.viii, Chambers, I. 1994, p.71

<sup>143</sup> Walvin, J. 1984, p.18

<sup>144</sup> Richards, J. 1997, pp.2-3

<sup>145</sup> Kiberd, D, 1996, p.6, Paxman, J. 1999, p.20

<sup>146</sup> Colley, L. 1996, p.7

<sup>147</sup> Colley, L. 1996. p.7

<sup>148</sup> Colley, L. 1996, p.7

<sup>149</sup> Runnymede Trust, The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain, Runnymede Trust, 2000, Coward, R. & Hall, S. A Question of Identity, The Observer, 15/10/00, p.27

<sup>150</sup> Hall, S. 1993, p.308

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- <sup>151</sup> Solomos, J. 1993, p.219
- <sup>152</sup> Anthias, F. 1992, pp.118-9
- <sup>153</sup> Anthias, F. 1992, p.121
- <sup>154</sup> Anthias, F. 1992, p.121
- <sup>155</sup> Horgan, J. Irish Post, 19/06/99, p.9
- <sup>156</sup> Anthias, F. 1992, p.121
- <sup>157</sup> See Chapter Nine, p.242
- <sup>158</sup> Bridging the generation gap, Irish Post, 02/08/97, p.4
- <sup>159</sup> Anthias, F. 1992, p.121
- <sup>160</sup> Walter, B. 1998, p.81
- <sup>161</sup> Wilpert, C. 1989, p.21
- <sup>162</sup> Chambers, I. 1994, p.6
- <sup>163</sup> Greeley, A. M. & McCready, W. The Transmission of Cultural Heritages: The Case of the Irish and Italians, in Glazer, N. & Moynihan, D. P. Ethnicity: Theory and Experience, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976, p.229
- <sup>164</sup> Anthias, F. 1992, p.121
- <sup>165</sup> Anthias, F. 1992, p.120
- <sup>166</sup> Anthias, F. 1992, p.139
- <sup>167</sup> Chambers, I. 1994, p.23
- <sup>168</sup> Gray, B. in MacLaughlin, J. (ed.), 1997. Akenson, D.H. 1996, p.5
- <sup>169</sup> Hall, S. 1993, p.310
- <sup>170</sup> Buckley, M. 1997, p.119

## **Chapter Seven: Irish Settlement in Birmingham**

### ***(7.i) Introduction***

In order to achieve an understanding of the experiences of the research population, it is important to establish the historical context for the research by providing an account of Irish settlement in Birmingham.<sup>1</sup>

I briefly outline the process of Irish migration to Birmingham and elsewhere in England in the period prior to the nineteenth century.

I then concentrate on the primary period of Irish settlement in Birmingham between 1939 and 1970, examining patterns of settlement, development of new communities and expressions of culture, heritage and ethnicity.

I subsequently focus on the event that is pivotal to the experience of the Irish communities in Birmingham in the latter half of the twentieth century: the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings'. I probe the immediate aftermath of the explosions, the anti-Irish backlash, longer-term effects upon the local Irish communities and the impact of these upon processes of identity formation for the research population.

This chapter is not an all-encompassing historical account of Irish settlement in Birmingham, despite the continued absence of such a published text.<sup>2</sup> It merely provides the context for Irish settlement in Birmingham in the latter half of the twentieth century and specifically the environment in which members of the research population have been socialised.

The earliest evidence of the population exchange between Ireland and England occurred in the wake of the Norman intervention of 1171.<sup>3</sup> Those dispossessed of their land and livelihoods were amongst the 'first trickle' of migrants to make the journey to port towns such as Liverpool and Bristol in the fourteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In

the period from 1200-1700, the Irish in England were depicted as a problematised presence: "slovenly intruders upon the green and pleasant land of England."<sup>5</sup>

Whilst there is evidence of a substantial Irish presence in cities such as Liverpool, Bristol, Manchester and London, the Irish represented only a small grouping within pre-eighteenth century Birmingham.<sup>6</sup>

The first major wave of Irish migration to England did not occur until 1800-1880. This period, which witnessed the Act of Union, 'Great Famine' and unprecedented demographic upheaval in Ireland, saw the Irish population decrease from 8,175,124 in 1841 to 6,555,385 in 1851.<sup>7</sup> During this period, 519,959 Irish people settled in England and Wales.<sup>8</sup>

In Birmingham, the Irish population more than doubled during the course of the famine period, from 4,683 in 1841 to 9,341 in 1851, increasing further to 11,332 by 1861. This however represents the height of Irish settlement in the city in the nineteenth century. By 1881, the figure had fallen to 7,072 and by 1901, it had fallen below pre-famine levels to just 4,217.<sup>9</sup>

Nineteenth century Irish settlement in Birmingham was considerably dwarfed by that in other major English urban centres. In 1851, there were 108,548 Irish people in London, 83,813 in Liverpool and 52,504 in Manchester.<sup>10</sup> Birmingham was not destined to become a major centre of Irish settlement until the mid-twentieth century.

The size of the Irish population, together with common employment patterns, close proximity with the local population and levels of intermarriage hastened assimilation. As Denvir records: "There are few places where the Irish are more intermixed and intermarried into the general population than in Birmingham."<sup>11</sup>

In the period 1911-1921, the number of Irish people living in Birmingham doubled to 6,055, or just 0.65% of the local population.<sup>12</sup> This, however was a mere precursor to events later in the century.

### ***(7.ii) Irish Settlement in Birmingham (1939-1974)***

#### ***The Second Wave of Irish Migration – War-time Settlement***

The Second World War effectively sparked the onset of a period of unprecedented Irish settlement in Birmingham. It also represented a watershed in the employment fortunes of Irish people in Britain. Pre-war, the Irish had almost exclusively filled those positions which the indigenous population did not wish to take.<sup>13</sup> Wartime personnel shortages opened up vast tranches of opportunities for the Irish population of Britain and thousands more who would emigrate during the hostilities.<sup>14</sup>

British government and company recruitment in Ireland assisted many in their migration, through schemes whereby employers paid fares and organised accommodation within the locality.<sup>15</sup> It is estimated that in the early years of the War an average of 2000 Irish were making the journey to Britain every week.<sup>16</sup>

Irish women were particularly drawn by these opportunities, as their role in Irish society remained severely restricted. Historical concerns about late marriages and discriminatory systems of inheritance were compounded by the Irish Free State's new constitution of 1937, which sought to confine Irish women to the home.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, Irish women in Britain were beginning to be accepted within the public sector and other white-collar environments.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the quasi-official approach to Irish recruitment, Irish neutrality ensured that travel restrictions were introduced in June 1940, limiting Irish movement between



the two islands.<sup>19</sup> These measures were also set against an Irish Republican bombing campaign in England, which saw a series of bombs planted in Birmingham and Coventry in 1939.<sup>20</sup> These caused considerable damage to local businesses, including Snow Hill Railway Station and further undermined the position of the Irish community, fuelling existing anti-Irish sentiments.<sup>21</sup> Despite restrictions and hostilities, it is estimated that between 90,000 and 100,000 Irish people moved to Britain between September 1941 and June 1945.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Post-war Settlement***

In the post-war period, emigration continued amidst the race to regenerate urban England. War-time restrictions were lifted between June and December 1946, leaving individuals free to take up any post, subject to prevailing anti-Irish discrimination.<sup>23</sup> The advances of the 1939-45 period meant that by the 1950s, Irish people were to be found in most sectors of employment. By 1951, 12% of Doctors in Britain were Irish.<sup>24</sup>

The Irish continued to colonise areas of employment, accounting for around a third of transport staff in Birmingham during the 1950s, whilst it is estimated that 60% of Irish males were employed in the construction industry in the same decade.<sup>25</sup> In 1965, a local newspaper recorded that: "Among the two dozen demolition sites in central Birmingham you will find some where the labour is almost 100% Irish."<sup>26</sup> One account rationalised such domination, not by reference to discrimination and inequality, but rather by the assumption that: "The Irish preferred outdoor work."<sup>27</sup>

For some, the concentration of Irish people within sectors of employment became a justification for their presence in the city. Bird states:

*"Whenever anti-Irish sentiments were expressed in the city in the years just following the Second World War we were reminded that if we kicked out the Irish the entire Birmingham public-transport system would grind to a halt. More recently the recruitment of coloured bus conductors and fearfully ebullient West Indian drivers has ensured that this would not be the case."*<sup>28</sup>

### ***Geographical Settlement***

Geographically, the Irish were dispersed throughout England. London continued to attract the largest proportion of emigrants with Paddington, Westminster and St Pancras each having a population of 6% or more in 1951.<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere, nineteenth century areas of settlement were largely surpassed by the cities of the Midlands and the south of England.<sup>30</sup> Liverpool and Bristol were replaced by Birmingham, Coventry and Luton, which had become the manufacturing heartlands of the British economy.

The Irish population of the county of Warwickshire, which incorporated Birmingham, grew from 11,000 in 1931 to 54,000 in 1951.<sup>31</sup> In Birmingham itself, the increase was even more dramatic, from 6,000 in 1931 to 59,000 in 1961, the latter representing 5.2% of the local population.<sup>32</sup> The Irish represented 69.4% of all overseas immigrants in 1951 and 58% in 1961.<sup>33</sup> Post-war influxes changed the nature of Irish settlement in Birmingham, creating new and vibrant communities. For the first time, Birmingham had a considerable Irish population.

For individuals, employment opportunities and personal connections in a particular area still largely determined location.<sup>34</sup> Ties of kinship provided initial accommodation, employment contacts and an established network in which the newcomer could operate before branching out on her/his own.

Concentrations of Irish people were also partly fuelled by anti-Irish prejudice: "In the days when you still could see 'No Irish, No Blacks, No dogs' signs up in bed and breakfast places, new arrivals tended to go where relatives were and lodge with them."<sup>35</sup>

Geographically, the Irish were more dispersed throughout the city than other ethnic groups. Zeisler records that only one third of migrants lived in what could be termed 'Irish clusters' and by the end of the 1960s, the Irish could be found in most parts of the city.<sup>36</sup> There were, however, significant concentrations of Irish people in particular areas of the city. In 1961, Sparkhill had an Irish population of 16.8%, neighbouring Sparkbrook 17.3% and Small Heath 17%.<sup>37</sup>

These 'Reception areas' were situated in inner city, working class districts, characterised by multi-occupancy, rented accommodation, which would later be home to other incoming migrant groups.<sup>38</sup> These often provided communal houses or 'lodgings', offering a bed, frequently in a shared room.

The 'lodging house' or 'digs' usually served as a temporary stopping-off point, before moving out to other types of accommodation and into new areas as financial situations or personal relationships demanded. As Rex and Moore record: "the Irish disperse to settle".<sup>39</sup> Whilst many moved out of Sparkhill, Sparkbrook and Handsworth, large numbers of Irish people settled in these areas. Others were destined to spend a greater length of time in 'digs' and in the 1990s there remained significant numbers of single, older Irish men living in multi-occupancy housing in these areas.<sup>40</sup>

Within areas with considerable Irish populations there were many visible signs of the Irish influence, Irish newspapers and products in local shops, Irish Public Houses and Irish dominated Roman Catholic Parish Churches. These symbols of Irishness often came together to gel the disparate elements of the Irish settlers into communities.

The 1960s witnessed a gradual move away from initial areas of settlement, out into the middle and, for a smaller number, outer suburbs of the city. The Irish primarily moved out to neighbouring areas such as Hall Green, Acocks Green, Kings Heath and Erdington, also often making the transition from rented accommodation to home-ownership.

Sutcliffe and Smith record that in 1961, the Irish accounted for 7.8% of those in the central ring, consisting of areas closest to the city centre, 8% in the middle ring and just 2.8% in the outer ring.<sup>41</sup> The significance for this research is that these central and middle areas are the very neighbourhoods in which the majority of the research population were socialised.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Social Settlement***

The degree of Irish settlement is also marked by patterns of intermarriage with individuals from other ethnic groups. Caulfield and Bhat, drawing on sample data from the 1971 census, calculate that 31% of marriages in Britain involving people who had been born in the Republic of Ireland were endogamous (both partners had been born in the Republic of Ireland). The rate for endogamous marriages was highest amongst the 25-44 age group, principally drawn from those who settled in Britain in the immediate post-war period.<sup>43</sup> This also means that 69% of marriages involving individuals who had been born in 'Ireland' were non-endogamous: an Irish person marrying a non-Irish partner. As Caulfield and Bhat caution, these figures do not take account of the number of marriages between people born in the Republic of Ireland and individuals who had been born in Britain with at least one parent who had been born in Ireland.<sup>44</sup> Caulfield and Bhat suggest that the concentration of Irish people within clusters of inner-city Britain means that there were likely to have

been higher number of such relationships.<sup>45</sup> These are not however listed as endogamous.

This picture is underlined in Birmingham by data relating to 'Live Births' in the city. In 1966, 3,366 babies were born to couples in which at least one of the partners had been born in Northern Ireland or Republic of Ireland. This represents 16.4% of all births in the city that year. In 1971, the figure was 2,132 babies, which means that 12.9% of all births that year were notionally 'Irish'.<sup>46</sup> Caulfield and Bhat further clarify the situation by disclosing that in 33.6% of 'Irish' births in 1970, both the parents had been born in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland. By 1977 this figure was 24%. This also indicates that, in these years, 66.4% and 76% of births involving Irish parents were within mixed (Irish and non-Irish) relationships.<sup>47</sup>

Such data underlines the progression of many of those who had moved to post-war Birmingham. They had settled in the city, established relationships with partners from both within and outside the Irish community and were beginning to bring up their children within their new environment. For many, this effectively committed their immediate futures to life within their adopted city.

The high percentage of 'Irish' births in the city during this period and the significant proportion born within the context of 'mixed' ethnic group relationships has great significance for this research. Firstly, it means that a considerable percentage of the research population will have grown up with a notion of the potential duality of their identity that is rooted in their parents' different ethnic origins. Secondly, the high number of 'Irish' births and concentration of Irish communities within specific areas of the city is likely to mean that many of these individuals grew up in close proximity to other individuals from other 'Irish' families. This is subsequently borne out in the numbers of 'Irish' children utilising local and specifically Roman Catholic Schools.

### ***Politicisation of the Irish Community***

A further indication of the settled and confident nature of the community is stressed by its willingness to participate in the civic and political life of the city. For the Irish in post-war Birmingham, this took two distinct forms; positioning in relation to local politics and Northern Ireland.

A considerable number of individuals within the Irish community in Birmingham became involved in local political and employment activism, principally within the trade union movement and the Labour Party.<sup>48</sup> In 1973, nine councillors on Birmingham City Council had been born in 'Ireland'.<sup>49</sup>

In relation to the other strand of politicisation, there were a number of attempts to mobilise the Irish community on the issue of Northern Ireland. In 1964, an organisation called the 'Irish Council', a committee of six Catholics and four Protestants, attempted to place Northern Ireland at the top of the British political agenda, by encouraging Irish people to spoil their ballot papers in the General Election of 1964, by writing against the names of Labour and Conservative party candidates: "You will get our vote when Irish unity gets your vote".<sup>50</sup>

There was also support for the Civil Rights campaign in Northern Ireland with the Birmingham Civil Rights Group's attempts to organise a mass strike by Irish workers in response to inequality in Northern Ireland.<sup>51</sup> This campaign was taken one step further with the suggestion that Clann na H'Eireann would put forward an Irish candidate to oppose Roy Hattersley, a Labour government minister.<sup>52</sup>

Whilst such campaigns were ultimately unsuccessful, they are at least indicative of the position and confidence of elements within the Irish community. Such activities led the local media to make a link between support for the civil rights movement and the Republican movement: "Politically the Birmingham branch of Sinn Féin has a

small membership but great influence among the city's Irish, many of whom support the local branch of the Campaign for Social Justice in Northern Ireland."<sup>53</sup>

The level of political organisation locally underlines the willingness of the group to integrate itself into local structures, whilst mobilisation in relation to the Northern Ireland situation stresses its confidence, particularly where such political sentiments run contrary to local opinion.

Whilst Irish people displayed evidence of integration, they also found new ways of expressing their Irishness. These utilised existing organisations that played a major role within Irish society and structures that reflected their new realities. For those who were from the Roman Catholic tradition, the Church was instrumental within both sets of structures.

### ***The Role of the Roman Catholic Church***

'The Church' offered four central pillars of support: spiritual, social, welfare and educational. It provided religious and spiritual support networks for the grouping, offering continuity with their previous lives and representing a bridge between two societies.<sup>54</sup> It offered spiritual support through its religious services and a sense of community through its parish structure, which included the children and grandchildren of previous generations of Irish migrants.

The Church was also instrumental in the organisation of social activities such as meetings and dances. These catered for the needs of significant sections of the Irish community and helped to draw many into contact with the local population. They also provided entertainment and social networks within controlled environments, in response to the perceived threat of local public houses and the Connolly Association.<sup>55</sup> The latter hastened efforts to establish an Irish Centre, which was

opened in Digbeth in 1957 to service the local population, which remained at the heart of the community for more than three decades.<sup>56</sup>

The Church, through the Dublin based Oblates of the Virgin Mary Order also secured a central role in welfare provision with the establishment of the Irish Welfare and Information Centre, which offers support on a range of social issues.<sup>57</sup>

Finally and most significantly for this study, the Catholic Church was instrumental in the sphere of education.<sup>58</sup> The Church, through its network of Roman Catholic primary and secondary schools, played a significant role in the lives of individuals and local Irish communities. The location of schools ensured the development of significant pockets of Irish settlement and ultimately ensured the long-term presence of Irish families within local areas. This brought together 'Irish' children for the purposes of education and social activities, to play a fundamental role in the socialisation of its pupils.

As I record in the introduction to this thesis, those who are from one of the Protestant traditions appear to be far more dispersed and less identifiable within local society. This may partly be explained by the relatively smaller numbers of Protestant people who left Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland to settle in Birmingham in the post-war period, membership of different faiths, the lesser concentration within particular schools and potentially, although largely speculative, different attitudes towards notions of integration.

### ***Social Organisation***

The Irish also founded other forms of organisation, support, community networking and development. The County Associations brought together individuals from particular counties, within their new locality, in order to strengthen their ties and



celebrate their roots.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) provided opportunities to play indigenous Irish sports and meet other Irish people.

The success of organisations such as the Catholic Church, Irish Centre, County Associations and GAA allowed the city's Irish population to create a community which was strong and active within the spheres of culture and social affairs. Other organisations such as Conradh na nGaelige, Comhaltas Ceoltorí Eireann and the Connolly Association catered for different cultural and political needs and aspirations of this community. Such organisations played a fundamental role in the socialisation of the research population, offering access to Irish culture and to other young Irish people.

The local Irish community also publicly celebrated its Irishness through the institution of the St Patrick's Day Parade. The annual procession through the city's streets provided a further opportunity for Irish people to come together to celebrate their ethnic identity and to look back to their homeland: "Ireland is so near England that, once here it is easy to be assimilated among the English, whom we like. March 17<sup>th</sup> gives us a chance to regain our national identity."<sup>60</sup>

### ***The End of the 'Second Wave'***

The 1960s drew to a close the second major wave of Irish migration, temporarily signalling the end of the rise in the numbers leaving Ireland for Britain. By the end of the decade there were sizeable Irish communities in most large English cities, a combination of the long established communities as in Manchester and London and new, vibrant communities such as that in Birmingham. The 1971 Census records that there were 1,097,961 people living in Birmingham, of these, 45,900 had been born in the Republic of Ireland and 11,720 in Northern Ireland.<sup>61</sup>

The end of the 1960s also signalled the beginning of a new and distinctive phase in the Anglo-Irish relationship, both as a result of the latest escalation of the Northern Ireland situation and the changing economic relationship.

Improved economic performance in Ireland precipitated a fall in the number of people leaving Ireland.<sup>62</sup> It is also estimated that up to 100,000 emigrants returned 'home' during the 1970s.<sup>63</sup> This impacted not only on Irish society but also on the demography of the Irish community in Birmingham, signalling a shift towards a community that would be dominated by post-war migrants and successive generations. This produces a different type of community and interpretations of identity to those in a city such as London, where new settlers constantly rejuvenate the community.<sup>64</sup>

This is the final piece in a complex jigsaw puzzle. Within the quarter of a century following the Second World War, unprecedented numbers of Irish people had arrived in Birmingham and established themselves within existing employment, residential and social patterns of settlement. This was cemented by the considerable number of individuals who had established personal relationships and the number of notional 'Irish' births.

By 1970, there existed a large Irish community in Birmingham, encompassing immense social and class diversity and which was increasingly multi-generational. Demographic changes within Irish society all but ensured the insularity of an Irish community that can, almost exclusively, trace its origins to the post-war period.

For anyone examining the situation of this fledgling community at the beginning of this decade, the indications appeared extremely positive. The Irish found new ways to celebrate their heritage, yet had simultaneously integrated themselves into the social, political and civic life of their adopted city. This relationship was however shattered by the events of a single evening in November 1974.

### ***(7.iii) The Birmingham Pub Bombings***

The planting of bombs in two city centre public houses by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 1974, resulted in the murder of twenty-one people, injuries to at least one hundred and sixty others and decimated the relationship between the Irish and the wider population of the city.<sup>65</sup> The bombs were not the first. Between August 1973 and August 1974, there were thirty-one explosions in the West Midlands. They were however the most devastating.<sup>66</sup> These events are pivotal to the subsequent experience of the Irish population of Birmingham.

The explosions in the 'Mulberry Bush' and the 'Tavern in the Town' public houses had dramatic ramifications for the local Irish community, with many holding the local Irish community responsible for the actions of the IRA.<sup>67</sup> The Irish Centre was the subject of fire-bomb attacks,<sup>68</sup> Irish businesses such as the College Arms public house and demolition firm J.J. Gallagher were petrol bombed, the latter causing £20,000 worth of damage.<sup>69</sup>

Individual Irish people were also victims of 'revenge' attacks, with people being beaten up in public houses and arson attacks on Irish homes.<sup>70</sup> An Irish mother, who gave birth in the hours following the explosions was told by another woman in the hospital ward that: "Another Irish bastard is born".<sup>71</sup>

Retaliation also took the form of an "anti-Roman Catholic backlash". There were attacks on the Sacred Heart Church in Aston, St Gerard's Junior and Infant school in Castle Vale and the Holy Family Church in Coventry Road, Small Heath.<sup>72</sup> Roman Catholic institutions were synonymous, at least in the minds of the perpetrators, with the 'Irish'.<sup>73</sup>

'*The Observer*' reported: "This weekend, Irish leaders – abused and vilified by anonymous telephone calls, which began as soon as the news of the bombings broke

– appear haunted men, fearful that one more violent IRA act could escalate the widespread anger into revenge and intimidation.”<sup>74</sup>

There were also widespread social and industrial protests. At Longbridge, 1,500 car workers went on strike, whilst a further 2,000 workers demonstrated outside another car plant in the city. There were also reports of car workers refusing to work with Irish colleagues and physical assaults and fights between Irish and British workers.<sup>75</sup>

At this time 15% of workers at British Leyland were Irish.<sup>76</sup>

Three hundred workers at a produce market in the city refused to handle “any goods with Irish connections”, whilst airport workers in Birmingham ‘blacked’ flights to Dublin and shops stopped stocking Irish goods.<sup>77</sup> One union leader even suggested: “that bricks might start falling accidentally on local building sites.”<sup>78</sup>

Local reactions were further enflamed when six locally based Irishmen were arrested and subsequently sentenced to twenty one life sentences for their alleged parts in the biggest mass murder in British history. This undoubtedly further shifted the focus onto the local Irish community from which the men were drawn.

The media warned of the effects of the backlash: “The people who are going to suffer are the ordinary people, and not those who are responsible for these things.”<sup>79</sup>

This was supported by a correspondent to the Birmingham Post’s letters page:

*“There are many good-living Irish people in this country whose fury and sense of shame at these outrages is conceivably greater than our own. They will suffer unmerciful punishment. And so we come the full circle; the majority suffer for the crimes of the minority.”*<sup>80</sup>

*‘The Observer’* warned that: “The estimated 110,000 Irish in Birmingham, roughly one in 10 of the population are already seeing themselves as a community apart.”<sup>81</sup>

Anti-Irish sentiments were undoubtedly fanned by elements within British political society. The Daily Telegraph reported that: "there are political extremists of all shades already fishing eagerly in these bloodied waters." In response to Republican violence, the National Front were organising anti-Irish demonstrations and calling for 'Eire' citizens to be declared 'Aliens'.<sup>82</sup>

Such sentiments prompted one correspondent to a local paper, to state: "Irish people now have two enemies – the bombers and the English people with revenge in their hearts. Please stop and think before it is too late."<sup>83</sup>

The Lord Mayor underlined the valued role of the Irish community within local society:

*"We are trying to ask people to remember that sound and good Irish men have helped build up this city for very many years. They have helped to operate its transport services, its building sites and further, in its hospitals as nurses and as doctors have done a sterling job."*<sup>84</sup>

Such calls were ringingly endorsed by the Birmingham Evening Mail: "Birmingham has many thousands of fine, law-abiding, peace-loving, industrious Irish people. They are horrified by these monstrous meaningless acts."<sup>85</sup>

Responses to the bombings largely failed to take account of the reaction of the Irish community. Irish organisations universally condemned the atrocities, the Irish Development Association, which owned the Irish Centre declared: "No words of ours can represent the utter revulsion we feel at this terrifying and unbelievable act of madness."<sup>86</sup> Whilst Clann na H'Eireann stated: "Without reservation and irrespective of source we condemn the slaughter tonight in Birmingham. There are not available to us words which would give full expression to our feeling of dismay."<sup>87</sup>

Irish community organisations planned an anti-IRA march in the city, but were dissuaded from doing so by police and City Council.<sup>88</sup> They were also at the forefront of donations to the Lord Mayor's fund for the victims: "Gifts from individual Irishmen living in Birmingham and Irish community organisations are pouring into the Lord Mayor's appeal fund for the city bomb victims – I had one for £400 today".<sup>89</sup> The Irish Development Association donated £1,000 to the fund.<sup>90</sup>

The acts of retaliation also overlooked the considerable number of Irish people who were victims of the explosions and the role played by Irish people in digging victims out of the rubble and Irish medics in tending the injured: "Irish people, too, were caught in the blasts and remain as much in danger as all other citizens so long as the bombings go on. And it is the law-abiding Irish who will suffer the hatred generated by the IRA."<sup>91</sup>

Amongst the dead were two brothers from Donegal. Listed amongst the injured was Breda O'Gorman, a Birmingham born Irish woman, as her father states: "Breda's experience has demonstrated that bombs are indiscriminate. Other Irish people were killed and maimed in Birmingham."<sup>92</sup>

The bombings are significant for the trauma of the events themselves, the ferocity of the backlash, reaction of the local Irish community and finally the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) in 1974.<sup>93</sup> They are arguably pivotal to the Irish experience in Birmingham since 1974. All future developments within the community must be viewed through the filter of these events, as one local newspaper recorded, it was: "the night that changed the face of Birmingham"<sup>94</sup>

The events ensured that the Irish, at an individual and community level, adopted a low profile within local society and found discreet ways of expressing their Irishness. The bombs forced the Irish to: "Keep their heads down."<sup>95</sup> One woman who had

been in Birmingham for thirty years, commented: "I have been here most of my life and now I am going to be afraid to open my mouth."<sup>96</sup>

The bombings and subsequent legislation ensured that the community was to be treated with suspicion in the post-bombing period. As one letter to the local press warned: "To those, and to all Birmingham citizens, I say: keep a very wary eye on your Irish neighbours. Report to the police any odd comings and goings or the delivery of strange parcels."<sup>97</sup>

As a further footnote, the vigorous campaign, led by leading figures within the Irish community, to prove the innocence of the six convicted Birmingham-based Irishmen, who became known as the 'Birmingham Six', ultimately led, after two unsuccessful appeals in 1976 and 1987, to the release of the 'Six' by the Court of Appeal on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1991. The victims of one of the longest miscarriage of justice cases in British legal history.<sup>98</sup>

#### ***(7.iv) The Post 'Pub Bombings' Period***

The second half of the 1970s and much of the 1980s were a barren period for the Irish as a community in Birmingham. This period was characterised by few overt public displays of Irishness, with the Irish community largely conducting its affairs within community based settings and drawing little attention to itself.<sup>99</sup> Throughout the city, Irish cultural activities such as dancing schools, music sessions, language classes and sport activities continued, but were conducted in Irish venues, Roman Catholic social centres and playing fields, out of sight of members of wider society. This resulted in the development of strong centres of Irish cultural excellence within local areas, but also ensured the very insular nature of these activities and networks. The effective ghettoisation of Irish culture in Birmingham in the post-1974 period is of particular significance for this research, for it is within this context that the

research population accessed different Irish cultural activities and potentially met other Irish people. These twin considerations play a fundamental role in socialising the individual and reinforcing the messages regarding Ireland which the individual may receive at home. The isolation of Irish cultural activities may also help to reinforce the clear distinction between the individual's experience within the home and community settings and those within other settings such as school. This distinction and resulting duality are magnified in Birmingham because of the wider societal reactions to the 'Pub Bombings'. This is explored further in Chapter Eight.

The low profile of the community was assisted by wider patterns of Irish demography and emigration during the 1980s. This period saw a third wave of mass Irish emigration. This was characterised by an initial exodus of highly educated and urbanised migrants and a later more general displacement of predominantly young Irish people.<sup>100</sup>

The significance of this shift for Birmingham is that the 1980s migrant was predominantly drawn to London, which accounted for 56.8% of all Irish migrants entering Britain while the West Midlands claimed only 6.4% in 1980-83 and just 1.9% since 1984.<sup>101</sup> Those who continued to migrate to Birmingham, often did so to access colleges and universities courses, to take specific employment opportunities or because of family connections. Shifting migration patterns further ensured that post-war migrants and successive generations would ultimately dominate the community.

During the late 1980s, the Irish community gradually emerged from its purdah. Its re-birth as a visible, audible force within local society and politics, can be traced to three key factors.

Firstly, the campaign to free the 'Birmingham Six' gave members of the community their first taste of sustained mass campaigning and lobbying since the bombings.



Having dealt with arguably the most contentious issue, the question of responsibility for the bombs, it would then be easier, although never easy, to articulate other demands on behalf of the community. Freedom for the 'Birmingham Six' arguably released the pressure valve that had constricted the activities of Irish people in the city in the intervening period.

Secondly, the emergence of the Birmingham Irish Community Forum in 1993, to represent and articulate the community's demands to the outside world, gave the community a focus and a platform upon which to highlight the needs of the local community and press for action. Those involved in its establishment took considerable risks and initially faced vilification, blank faces and closed doors. It is a credit to individuals such as Fr. Taaffe, Gobnait Ní Chrualoaí, Pat McGillicuddy and 'Cork' Frank Ryan that 'the Forum' has so dramatically grown into an organisation, that is recognised by Birmingham City Council and receives funding from the National Lotteries Charities Board and the Irish government.

The third and most visible factor is the re-birth of the St Patrick's Day Parade in 1996. The Parade was absent from the city's civic calendar for 22 years following the bombings and the prospect of its re-introduction was greeted with opposition from the local media. The Evening Mail decreed that: "city Labour councillors have not only bowed to pressure to restart the March 17 event – but are proposing to give organisers a helping hand out from Birmingham's council taxes."<sup>102</sup> Irish journalist, Maureen Messant commented that: "The parade became something of a political hot potato, best served by placing on one side."<sup>103</sup> Most critically, an Evening Mail editorial stated:

*"There also needs to be a more substantial reason for the parade other than that they take place in other cities. Other cities have not suffered the slaughter of*

*November 1974, the effects of which extended far beyond those unfortunate innocent victims and their families.*<sup>104</sup>

The Parade's organising committee pressed on and the first post-pub bombings St Patrick's Day Parade took place in March 1996. It was an unconditional success with more than 3,000 participants including musicians, dancers and representatives of Irish community groups across the city. This was the start of a phenomenon that would continue to rapidly grow year on year and occupy increasing significance within both the Irish community and the local civic calendar. By 1998, the 'Birmingham Post' estimated that 30,000 were in attendance.<sup>105</sup> Estimates for the 1999 and 2000 events suggest that 50,000 and 75,000 respectively took to the streets of the city making it the third largest St Patrick's Day Parade after New York and Boston.<sup>106</sup>

Even those who had warned against the re-introduction of the Parade were quick to praise its success. By 1997, Maureen Messant and the Evening Mail were claiming the parade as their own. Messant's reports are littered with 'we' did this and 'our' Parade, 'our' mass.<sup>107</sup>

The Parade has given Irish people a way in which to be Irish in a visible and public way, that had been absent for more than twenty years. Its continued success has shown that such a vehicle was needed and its presence within the civic calendar will undoubtedly have increased the self-confidence of many within the local Irish community. As 'Second generation, Birmingham-Irishman', Joe Horgan records: "I know now one of the main things I've always felt on St Patrick's Day is a sense of belonging. This is what I am, these are the people who share it and now I'm going to celebrate it."<sup>108</sup> He continues: "It is a chance for people to express their Irishness in the safe company of those like them."<sup>109</sup>

The resurrection of the parade coincided with the progress of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, success of the Republic of Ireland football team, the advent of Irish theme pubs and increasing popularity of aspects of Irish culture such as 'Riverdance'. Birmingham would appear a far more positive place in which to be Irish and in which to formulate an Irish identity. Birmingham has begun to move 'full circle' back to the situation, which existed prior to the 'Bombings', in which it is possible to be Irish in Birmingham in a visible and audible way.

The continued absence of a separate category in the 1991 Census means that it is impossible to calculate the true size of the Irish community in Birmingham or elsewhere in Britain.<sup>110</sup> The 1991 Census records 38,290 people having been born in either the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland and 56,050 individuals who lived in households in which the head had been born in 'Ireland', the latter representing 5.8% of the local population.<sup>111</sup> Nugent estimates that the number of 'children' born to Irish people in the city is likely to mean that the number of Irish people in Birmingham is closer to 140,000 or 14% of the local population. I would question such a figure, as it assumes that all those who were born with at least one 'Born in Ireland' parent will identify as Irish. This research demonstrates that this is not the case.

Having set the historical and theoretical context for this study, I now go on to offer an account of the fieldwork phase of the research. I begin by analysing the responses to the survey phase.

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<sup>7</sup> Akenson, D. H. The Irish Diaspora: A Primer, 1996, P.21

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<sup>11</sup> Denvir, J, The Irish In Britain, 1892, p.415

<sup>12</sup> Census Data, 1911, Birmingham Central Statistical Office.

<sup>13</sup> Zeisler, K. I. 1989, p.163, Lennon, M. 1988, p.25

<sup>14</sup> Zeisler, K. I. 1989, pp.163-173 Lennon, M. 1988, p.25. Foster suggests that upto 42,000 Irish citizens were recruited into the British Army during World war Two

<sup>15</sup> A UK Permit Office and other recruiting agencies were opened in Dublin, with at least the tacit approval of the Irish Government. These were successful in recruiting large numbers of Irish citizens to work in the war-time industries such as munitions, construction and demolition in O' Connor, K. The Irish in Britain, 1972, p.82. The recruitment schemes took place against the backdrop of continued Irish neutrality, this caused considerable difficulties between the two governments, but it was never allowed to interfere with the mutually beneficial process of war-time migration.

<sup>16</sup> O'Connor, K. 1972, p.82, Lee, J. J. 1995, p.226

<sup>17</sup> Lennon, M et al. 1988, pp.23-4

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## **Chapter Eight: Fieldwork Analysis - Survey Data**

### ***(8.i) Introduction***

Presentation of the fieldwork data is divided into two separate chapters, reflecting the two phases of the fieldwork. This chapter offers an overview of the data from the survey phase, encompassing 120 questionnaires, 90 of whom are members of research population. This provides a precursor to Chapter Nine, which explores data from the interview phase, incorporating 15 in-depth qualitative interviews. Particular emphasis is placed on the data from the interview phase, as this provided a greater opportunity to explore a broad range of issues in considerable depth.

### ***(8.ii) Survey Phase***

The respondents to the first phase of the fieldwork are drawn from three separate groupings. The first is made up of individuals who were born in 'Ireland' and who have 'children' who were born in Birmingham; these account for 20 respondents. As previously recorded, these individuals were then used as a filter to their offspring who were asked to complete questionnaires. Of the 'born in Ireland' grouping, 15 were born in the Republic of Ireland and 5 in Northern Ireland.

The second group is comprises those who are commonly identified as being 'Third generation Irish': those who have at least one grandparent who was born in Ireland. There were 10 such respondents to the survey phase. This grouping were also used as a further filter to other potential subjects.

The final grouping comprises members of the target population. This grouping accounts for 90 survey subjects. Whilst recording that the data from all 120 respondents provides an excellent insight into the experiences of the Irish community in Birmingham, the following analysis will concentrate on the responses

of those 90 respondents who are members of the target population. Therefore, in relation to the presentation of survey data, the total number of responses is 90.

### ***(8.iii) Survey Analysis***

#### ***Demographics***

In gender terms, 53 (58.9%) respondents were female and 37 (41.1%) male. I endeavoured to ensure that there were even numbers of female and male respondents, for example through the use of both female and male gatekeepers and a range of settings. However, the gender imbalance may simply reflect the greater reluctance of male members of the research population to complete surveys. Whilst it is not possible to validate such a suggestion from the current data, it is at least hinted at by one male respondent:

*"Whilst filling this questionnaire out I started to feel a bit suspicious. If I had not met XXXX (name of gatekeeper) and had a chat I don't think I would have filled it out. I think it might have something to do with the unstable political relationship between Britain and Ireland."* **(ID27)**

The age structure of the respondents reflects the demographic structure of the Irish community in Birmingham and patterns of post-war Irish settlement in Birmingham. This group of respondents are predominantly the children of those Irish migrants who settled in the city in the period between 1945 and 1970, which ensures that the majority of subjects are drawn from the groups between 26 and 55 years.<sup>1</sup> Table One details the age distribution of respondents.

**Table One: Age Distribution of Target Group Respondents N=90**

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
18-25 Years	18 (20%)
26-35 Years	34 (37.8%)
36-45 Years	25 (27.8%)
46-55 years	7 (7.8%)
56-65 Years	2 (2.2%)
66-75 Years	3 (3.3%)
76-85 Years	1 (1.1%)

***Place of residence***

Respondents are drawn from areas throughout the city, once again there is a concentration in areas where there have been high levels of Irish settlement in the post-war period. For example, 7 subjects record that they grew up in Sparkhill and Sparkbrook and 8 in Edgbaston and 3 in Handsworth. These areas form part of the inner ring of the city, which provided homes to many newly arrived Irish.

Other subjects were socialised in areas which are not commonly perceived to have had high Irish populations, these include areas such as Castle Bromwich, Kings Norton and Marston Green. A further small number were born in areas directly surrounding the city, in areas such as Solihull, Sandwell and Tamworth, whilst ID01 was born in Wales and subsequently moved to Birmingham as a teenager.

The aim of the survey phase was not to achieve a representative sample of individuals on the basis of area of residence, but rather to ensure a sample which included individuals from as broad a range of areas as possible, in order to examine the different experiences of individuals in these areas. Table Two offers a complete list of the areas of residence.

**Table Two: Areas of Residence in Childhood****N=90**

<b><u>Area</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Respondents</u></b>
Edgbaston	8
Moseley	8
Selly Oak	7
Sutton Coldfield	7
Marston Green	4
Sparkbrook	4
Winson Green	4
Bearwood	3
Birmingham (Central)	3
Erdington	3
Handsworth	3
Harborne	3
Northfield	3
Sparkhill	3
Balsall Heath	2
Great Barr	2
Kings Norton	2
Smethwick	2
Solihull	2
Acocks Green	1
Aston	1
Castle Bromwich	1
Dudley	1
Ladywood	1
Lichfield	1
Nechells	1
Oldbury	1
Shard End	1
Wolverhampton	1
Wales	1
Area Not Stated	6

## ***Education***

Individuals are drawn from a range of educational backgrounds, with subjects encompassing those who left school without any formal qualifications, those who attained O-levels and GCSEs and those who have completed post-16 and university-based education. Once again, due to the lack of baseline statistical data relating to the research population and patchy ethnic monitoring of this group, it has not been possible to derive a representative sample based on educational experience, however, I have sought to ensure that as full a range of educational experiences as possible has been included.

All subjects have completed the statutory period of education up to the age of sixteen years. 57 attended Roman Catholic schools, 7 attended Church of England schools and 26 attended non-denominational schools.

9 Survey respondents report that they have no formal qualifications. 58 have completed a form of college-based, post-sixteen education, including A-Level study, GNVQ, evening classes and employment related qualifications. This includes individuals who left school at sixteen, but have subsequently returned to part or full-time education. 43 have completed periods of university education, with 28 possessing degrees at undergraduate level and 15 having completed or, in the process of completing post-graduate courses.

## ***Employment***

The majority of respondents are in paid employment. 53 (58.9%) are in full-time employment, 13 (14.4%) in a part-time capacity, 1 (1.1%) is self-employed, 3 (3.3%) are currently unemployed, another subject (1.1%) records that she is currently unemployed and a student, 10 (11.1%) are full-time students, whilst a

further 2 (2.2%) record that they jointly work and study on a part-time basis. 3 (3.3%) subjects record that they are 'housewives' and 4 (4.4%) are retired.

Respondents are drawn from a plethora of different sectors of employment. These include accountants, teachers, domestic assistants, a butcher, nursery nurses, social workers and financial managers. The grouping represents a broad cross-section of the current employment market.

### ***Personal Relationships and Children***

42 (46.7%) individuals record that they are single, 32 (35.6%) are married, 5 (5.6%) live with a partner, including 1 (1.1%) with a same sex partner, 8 (8.9%) are divorced and/or separated and 3 (3.3%) are widowed.

40 subjects (44.4%) have children, whilst 50 (55.6%) report that they do not. Of the former grouping, 16 record their children's identity as 'British', 8 as 'English', 3 as 'Irish', 11 suggest labels which combine both Irish and, in the broadest sense, 'British' elements, whilst 2 do not state a label.

Interestingly, of the 9 subjects who identify themselves as 'Irish only' and have children, 3 label their children 'Irish', 3 as 'English', 1 as 'Irish Brummie', 1 as 'British-Irish descent', 1 not stated. This offers an indication of the degree to which Irish identification appears to be decreasing with the passing of each generation.

### ***Parents***

Individuals were asked to supply details relating to their parents. 52 state that both of their parents had been born in Ireland. This includes 4 who identify their parents as being from Northern Ireland and as 'British'. A further 5 subjects have one parent who had been born in Ireland and the other who was born in England, but identify as 'Irish'. Consequently, it can be approximated that 57 subjects are the children of

endogamous relationships. Further material relating to the ethnicity of parents can be found in Table Ten, which cross-references the types of identity which individuals adopt with their parents' places of birth.

Of the remaining subjects, 15 have a mother who was born in Ireland and a father who was born outside Ireland, 9 of these were born in England. A further 15 had a father who had been born in Ireland and a mother born elsewhere. The remaining 3 subjects did not state their parents' places of birth.

### ***Religion***

67 of the 90 subjects (74.4%) identify that they have been a member of a religious grouping at some point in their life, whilst the remaining 23 (25.6%) have never been a member of any such organisation.

Of the former grouping of 67 subjects, 63 (94%) had been members of the Roman Catholic faith, 2 (3%) of the Church of England and 2 (3%) of the United Reformed Church. Thus there is a considerable bias towards individuals who have been members of the Roman Catholic Church. This can partially be explained by the difficulty experienced by the researcher in identifying members of Non-Roman Catholic religious groups during the course of the fieldwork. I explore this elsewhere in the thesis.

In order to plot the religious activity of individuals over time, respondents were also asked whether they are currently members of a religious grouping. The respondents are exactly evenly split, with 45 subjects (50%) reporting that they are currently members of a religious organisation and 45 (50%) recording no such affiliation. This suggests a marked shift from the situation detailed in relation to previous participation. Table Three details the comparative data, which conceals a number of hidden patterns.

**Table Three: Religious Participation****N=90**

<b>Affiliation at any time during Life</b>	<b>Participation Now</b>	<b>Number</b>
Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	39
Roman Catholic	Church of England	1
Roman Catholic	Ethiopian Orthodox	1
Roman Catholic	Christian	1
Roman Catholic	Yes – Not Stated	1
Church of England	Church of England	1
United Reformed Church	Church of England	1
Roman Catholic Church	None	20
Church of England	None	1
United Reformed Church	None	1
None	None	23

Of the 67 subjects who record that they have been a member of a religious grouping at some point during their lives, 22 are no longer a member of any such group. This suggests a move away from organised religion, with one third (32.8%) of those who had been members of a religious grouping no longer holding such an affiliation. The bias in the current sample means that this is most evident in the number of individuals who have ceased to identify themselves as members of the Roman Catholic Church. It is however important to question whether this is particular to this target population or is part of a wider societal shift?

As Table Three details, the data also conceals further hidden patterns, with three respondents stating that they have moved from one religious grouping to another and a further two subjects recording that, whilst they have been members of the



Roman Catholic Church, they now record their affiliation as 'Christian' or do not detail an organisation.

### ***Visits to Ireland***

Respondents were asked whether they had visited Ireland, both in childhood and in adulthood. Tables Four and Five detail the responses in relation to visits at these different stages.

**Table Four: Visits to Ireland (Childhood)**

**N=90**

#### **(i) Did You Visit Ireland During Childhood?**

Yes	80 (88.9%)
No	10 (11.1%)

#### **(ii) If Yes, How Often?**

**N=80**

Every Year	57 (71.2%)
At Least Once Every Five Years	18 (22.5%)
At Least Once in Childhood	5 (6.3%)

That 88.9% of those surveyed had visited Ireland during childhood and 71.2% of these individuals had visited on an annual basis underlines the degree to which the 'return home' was part of the annual calendar of members of the research population and their families. The high number of visits to Ireland suggests the degree of contact which the respondents enjoyed with Ireland and with members of their extended families. This is further borne out in the responses of the interview subjects, these are explored in greater detail in the subsequent chapter.

As Table Five records, high levels of access to Ireland are also reflected in relation to visits during adulthood.

**Table Five: Visits to Ireland During Adulthood**      **N=90**

**(i) Have You Visited Ireland as an Adult?**

Yes	76 (84.4%)
No	14 (15.6%)

**(ii) If Yes, How Often?**      **N=76**

Every Year	37 (48.7%)
At Least Once Every Five Years	32 (42.1%)
At Least Once	7 (9.2%)

The above figures indicate the high number of visits undertaken by members of the subject and the way in which patterns of behaviour which are established in childhood help to shape later life. This appears to suggest a considerable connection between the individual, Ireland and their extended families. However, the rationale for continued visits is examined in greater detail in Chapter Nine.

***Irish Cultural Activities***

Respondents were asked about their participation in Irish cultural activities, once again this related to both childhood and subsequent life.

In relation to Irish dancing, 42 (46.7%) subjects have taken part in Irish dancing classes at some point in their lives, 6 (6.7%) of these in the last five years and a further 6 (6.7%) in the last year. This group is predominantly drawn from female respondents, with 10 male respondents citing previous or current participation. It is

of course important to record that the majority of subjects, 48 (53.3%), have not participated in Irish dancing related activities.

A similar picture is witnessed in relation to levels of participation in Gaelic sports. 67 (74.4%) respondents have not participated in Gaelic sports at any point in their life. Of the remaining 23 (25.6%) subjects; 14 subjects having participated at some point, a further 5 in the last five years and the remaining 4 in the last year.

A total of 12 subjects have participated in Irish language classes; 4 at some point in their lives, 2 in the last five years and 6 in the last year. 78 subjects have not participated in language related activities.

Finally in relation to Irish music, 21 subjects have participated in Irish musical activities, whether formally or informally, 11 at an undetermined point, 7 in the last five years, 3 in the last year. 69 subjects have undertaken no such participation.

Whilst it is possible to deduce from the above statistics that the majority of subjects have not participated in the particular cultural activities outlined, it is important to consider the overall significance of these various sets of data. This reveals that 61 respondents have participated in one or more Irish cultural activities at some point in their life, compared to 29 subjects who have not participated in any Irish cultural activities. This reveals a number of things about the attitudes and motivations of individuals and their parents, who in a number of cases involved their children in such activities. It also reveals the scale of organisation of Irish cultural activities within a significant number of areas of Birmingham.

### ***Purchasing of Irish Newspapers***

In order to test the behaviour and attitudes of participants, individuals were asked whether they currently, or had ever purchased one of the newspapers which cater

specifically for Irish communities in Britain, such as the Irish Post and Irish World.

Table Six details their responses.

**Table Six: Have you purchased an Irish Community Newspaper?      N=90**

Regularly	26 (28.9%)
Occasionally	41 (45.6%)
Never	19 (21.1%)
Not Stated	4 (4.4%)

As Table Six suggests, almost three-quarters of respondents have purchased an Irish newspaper. This may suggest that the individuals attach some significance to the content of these newspapers and perceive them to be relevant to them.

### ***Football Allegiances***

Subjects were also asked to record which team or teams they supported within the realms of international football. Once again this sponsored a range of responses.

**Table Seven: Which International Football Team(s) do you support?**

<b><u>Football Team(s)</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Subjects</u></b>
England & Republic of Ireland	24 (26.7%)
Republic of Ireland	19 (21.1%)
England	9 (10%)
Republic of Ireland & Northern Ireland	3 (3.3%)
England & Northern Ireland	2 (2.2%)
England, Republic of Ireland & Scotland	2 (2.2%)
England, Republic of Ireland & Northern Ireland	2 (2.2%)
Republic of Ireland, Wales, Poland	1 (1.1%)
England, Republic of Ireland, Scotland & Wales	1 (1.1%)
None	26 (28.8%)

It is interesting to note that of the 64 subjects who record their footballing allegiances, only 28 (43.8%) select a single team, with the remaining 36 respondents identifying support for more than one team. I posit that this indicates the position of the research population in negotiating competing demands.

### ***Discrimination and Abuse***

Of the 90 individuals surveyed, 47 subjects (52.2%) report that they perceive themselves to have experienced abuse or discrimination as a result of their Irish heritage. The remaining 43 (47.8%) report no such incidents. Of the former figure, respondents report experiencing different forms of abuse and discrimination. The questionnaire differentiated between verbal and physical forms of abuse and discrimination, with an opportunity for respondents to record any other type of abuse they had experienced.

Of the 47 respondents who state that they have experienced abuse, 39 (83.0% of those within this sub-grouping and 43.8.% of the wider grouping) record that they have experienced verbal abuse. A further 8 subjects (17.0% of the sub-group and 9% of the target population) have experienced incidents of physical abuse, in each case this was accompanied by incidents of verbal abuse.

A small number of respondents identify incidences of what, in the post-MacPherson era, would be termed 'institutional racism'. Respondents report cases of abuse or discrimination at the hands of police personnel, teachers and social workers. **(ID33, ID68, ID72)** Another respondent reports experiencing 'psychological abuse'. **(ID68)**

These incidences of verbal and physical abuse are said to have taken place in a number of different settings, these are recorded in Table Eight. For the purposes of

ease of analysis, I divide the data in this table into two distinct categories, those who have experienced abuse or questioning in single settings and those who have experienced such responses in more than one setting. For example, a number of subjects state that they been verbally abused at school (education), in public houses (social settings) and in the workplace (employment).

**Table Eight: Settings for Incidences of Abuse**

**N=47**

**(i) Experiences in Single Settings**

<b><u>Setting</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Subjects</u></b>
Education only	8 (17.0%)
Social Setting only	5 (10.6%)
Employment only	4 (8.5%)
'Institutional' Only	1 (2.1%)

**(ii) Experiences in Multiple Settings**

<b><u>Settings</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Subjects</u></b>
Employment & Social Settings	12 (25.5%)
Education & Employment & Social Settings	9 (19.1%)
Education & Social Settings	8 (17.0%)

18 (20% of all subjects) subjects report that they have experienced abuse in a single setting, however, 30 individuals (33.3%) record experiencing multiple incidences of abuse. Once again these took place in a range of settings, from the schoolyard to the factory floor. This includes one respondent who reports that he had been physically attacked by a teacher at school. **(ID71)**

Respondents report examples of incidents of anti-Irish abuse within local society. ID19 details the chanting of: 'No Surrender to the IRA', 'Fuck the Pope' and pro-Ulster Defence Association (UDA) songs at local football matches and in other settings. **(ID19)** Another recalls being "Segregated at college during IRA bombing campaign" **(ID75)**, whilst ID86 states that: he is: "sick of ignorant jokes about Irish people." **(ID86)**

ID82 records: "most of the discrimination/racism that I have experienced has been of a subtle nature. I have often felt 'excluded' (intentionally or otherwise) when with groups of white English friends etc. I believe that people have preconceived perceptions of how I 'should act' because I am Irish." **(ID82)**

This has implications for the identity of members of the target population:

*"Racist remarks directed against Irish people in general can be damaging to any person with Irish links/extraction. Do they speak up? Or hide their Irishness? This has psychological significance. I think that in Birmingham as a celebration of Irishness as a saleable commodity form, vocal, outspoken overt anti-Irish statements are also on the increase unfortunately."* **(ID84)**

It can perhaps be surmised that at least some of the incidents occurred as a result of anti-Irish sentiments sponsored by the Birmingham Pub Bombings. However, incidences appear to be continuing at a point when the Irish profile in the city is increasingly rising. It would appear that progress has merely triggered anti-Irish sentiments which have been passed down from generation to generation within British society.

A number of subjects indicate that they have experienced negative responses and abuse from other Irish people in Birmingham and in Ireland. Whilst the majority of

experiences were related to incidents involving non-Irish elements within the local population, a number of respondents detailed experiences of abuse which took place in Irish venues and/or in Ireland. ID87 records that:

*"I regret that I wasn't brought up with more awareness of Irish culture and my identity. I lived my mother and when I visited my father in Ireland he would always tell me that I should be proud of being Irish. As a child this meant nothing to me. My dad would always apologise to anyone outside the family that we met because we had English accents."* **(ID87)**

ID19 rationalises his experiences, stating: "The number of negative indicators about my background have come from roughly even, British and Irish born sources. The first I can live with and put it down to ignorance. The second source I find much more offensive." **(ID19)**

Many negative experiences relate to attempts by Birmingham born people to identify as 'Irish'. For example, one respondent perceives, in reference to Birmingham born Irish people who support the Republic of Ireland football team: "Irish born people unhappy that 'English' people are supporting their team." **(ID19)** This mirrors my own experience within the Birmingham Irish Centre when, during a Republic of Ireland football match, I overheard two young men with Dublin accents state: "there are an awful lot of English people in here tonight." Once again the 'English people' they refer to are Irish people who have been born in Birmingham and supported the Republic of Ireland football team, a team with a fair scattering of players who were been born in England!



The central dilemma for the subject grouping is, as one respondent recounts: "We are not regarded as Irish by the Irish community (including parents. But are not regarded as British by British people." **(ID41)**

This sentiment is supported by ID42, who states:

*"Being born of Irish parents - being second generation Irish does pose its problems as one is neither 100% Irish or 'English'. If you were black then it would be obvious to others that one's background wasn't straight forward. Being White Second Generation is not visual obviously so people find it hard to realise your roots are equally important. In Ireland one is definitely perceived as English."* **(ID42)**

It is interesting to note that almost 10% of those who state that they have experienced discrimination or abuse identify exclusively as 'British' or 'English'. Whilst this is barely statistically significant, I would question whether these two factors are linked. Have individuals, prompted by negative responses to being viewed as 'Irish', reacted consciously or sub-consciously by denying their Irishness and embracing a form British identity. I explore this further with this sub-group in relation to the interview phase.

The levels of abuse and discrimination reported by respondents is extremely high, with 52.2% reporting some form of abuse. The fact that a range of settings for this abuse are identified is highly significant. If incidents were restricted to educational settings, one could speculate about factors within the British education system which precipitate or encourage the spread of anti-Irish sentiments, but that incidents are reported in a range of settings and at different points in the individual's lives, indicates the extent of anti-Irish sentiments within sections of British society.

## ***Labels***

Survey subjects were presented with a list of labels, from which they were asked to select those which they are comfortable adopting as part of their personal identity.

Respondents selected a vast array of labels. Table Nine offers an overview of the complicated picture which emerges from this exercise. For ease of analysis, labels are grouped according to whether individuals incorporate 'British' and 'English' dimensions only, 'Irish' only and those who adopt a series of labels which include both 'British/English' and 'Irish' dimensions.

**Table Nine: Labels of Identity**

### **(i) British Elements Only**

<b>Label(s)</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
British	10 (11.1%)
English	6 (6.7%)
British, English	5 (5.6%)
English Brummie	4 (4.4%)
British English Brummie	1 (1.1%)
British, Brummie	1 (1.1%)
British, Welsh, European, Polish	1 (1.1%)
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>28 (31.1%)</b>

### **(ii) Irish Only**

<b>Label(s)</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Irish	17 (18.9%)
Second-generation Irish	1 (1.1%)
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>18 (20%)</b>

**(iii) Multiple Forms**

<b>Label(s)</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
British Irish	4 (4.4%)
British, Irish, Brummie	3 (3.3%)
British, Irish, Northern Irish	3 (3.3%)
English, Irish	3 (3.3%)
Irish Descent, Irish, English, Brummie	3 (3.3%)
Irish Brummie	3 (3.3%)
British Irish English	2 (2.2%)
British, Irish, English, Brummie, European	2 (2.2%)
British (2), Irish (1), Of the Celts (3)	1 (1.1%)
British Irish Descent, English, Brummie	1 (1.1%)
British, Irish African-Caribbean, Mixed Race,	1 (1.1%)
British, Irish, Brummie, European	1 (1.1%)
British, Irish, English, Brummie	1 (1.1%)
British, Irish, English, Mixed Race, Welsh	1 (1.1%)
British, Irish, English, Scottish, Welsh	1 (1.1%)
British Irish, Second-generation Irish	1 (1.1%)
British, Mixed Race, Brummie, European,	1 (1.1%)
British, Northern Irish, African-Caribbean, Brummie	1 (1.1%)
British, Brummie, Irish Descent	1 (1.1%)
British, English, Mixed Race Irish Descent	1 (1.1%)
Irish Birmingham-Irish	1 (1.1%)
Irish Brummie, Second generation Irish	1 (1.1%)
Irish, English, Brummie, European	1 (1.1%)
Irish, English, Mixed Race	1 (1.1%)
Irish, European, Brummie	1 (1.1%)
Mixed Race, Brummie	1 (1.1%)
Irish, Welsh, Brummie Mixed Race <sup>2</sup>	1 (1.1%)
Mixed Race, Brummie, European, Mongrel	1 (1.1%)
Northern Irish, English, Mixed Race	1 (1.1%)
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>44 (48.9%)</b>

A number of interesting points emerge from the various responses of subjects to the question of labels of identity. Firstly, as previously indicated, the sheer number of labels and combinations of label suggested, indicates the diversity of experience within this grouping and the differing significance attached to many of the labels adopted.

It is interesting to note that less than half of respondents (44 or 48.9%) incorporate the 'British' label amongst their labels of identity. As I have suggested elsewhere in this thesis, the reluctance of a section of subjects to do so lies in the roots and experience of the Anglo-Irish historical relationship and recent events in Northern Ireland. Where such a relationship is not present, one would expect a fair greater number of subjects to have embraced the 'British' label. However, for more than half the subjects, adoption of this term appears problematic. This and other issues relating to identity are explored in greater detail in Chapter Nine.

The 'Irish' label appears to be somewhat less problematic, although not devoid of problems. A total of 62 (68.9%) subjects include Irish amongst their identity labels, however only 18 (20%) subjects are comfortable adopting 'Irish' as their sole label of identity. Once again the rationale for such adoption is explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

As a footnote to this stage of the analysis, it is important to record that 9 respondents directly express their pride in their Irish cultural background. Almost all in nearly identical terms: "Proud of my Irish heritage" (**ID57**), "Proud to be of Irish Descent" (**ID58**), "Proud to be Irish" (**ID51**) and "Irish and Proud of it". (**ID79**)

One respondent reports that her sense of being Irish had increased as she has grown older: "I believe as I have aged I am more aware and proud of my Irish roots." (**ID40**) I argue that the use of the terms 'roots' and 'origins' acknowledges the process of looking back.

Having outlined the labels which individuals which individuals adopt, it is important now to cross reference this by the places of birth of their parents to determine whether there is a correlation between the two factors. See Table Ten.

**Table Ten: Parental Places of Birth & Label of Identity Adopted by Subjects - N=90**

<b>Parents' Places of Birth</b>		<b>Types of Labels Adopted by Subject</b>		
<b>Mother</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>British</b>	<b>Multiple</b>	<b>Irish</b>
England	Republic of Ireland	7	5	3
Republic of Ireland	England	2	6	3
Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland	4	4	1
Republic of Ireland	Republic of Ireland	9	19	7
Republic of Ireland	Northern Ireland	3	1	0
Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland	0	2	0
Republic of Ireland	Second Generation Irish	0	1	1
SA/Irish	Republic of Ireland	0	0	1
Second Generation Irish	Republic of Ireland	0	1	0
Republic of Ireland	Wales	0	2	0
Republic of Ireland	West Indies	0	2	0
Northern Ireland	Scotland	1	0	0
Northern Ireland	England	1	0	0
Republic of Ireland	Poland	1	0	0
Not Recorded	Not Recorded	0	0	2
Northern Ireland	Not Recorded	0	0	1
Republic of Ireland	Not Recorded	0	1	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>18</b>

Prior to undertaking the fieldwork, I harboured a crude assumption that those individuals whose parents had both been born on the island of Ireland were most likely to adopt either an exclusively Irish or Northern Irish identity. The reality is that this is not born out in the data. Of the 50 individuals whose parents were both born on the island of Ireland, only 8 identify exclusively as Irish. If one concentrates on those individuals whose parents were both born in the Republic of Ireland, who it may be assumed are most likely to identify as Irish, only 7 of the 35 individuals adopt exclusively Irish labels. It is however interesting to note that this grouping were most likely to adopt a multiple form of identity, which acknowledges their Irish ethnic heritage. Aside from this insight, there is little in the data which is of particular significance. For example, there is little evidence to support Yuval-Davis and Anthias' notion of the mother as the carrier of culture:

*"Women are the main socialisers of small children, but in the case of ethnic minorities they are often less assimilated socially and linguistically within the wider society. They may be required to transmit the rich heritage of ethnic symbols and ways of life to the other members of the ethnic group, especially the young."*<sup>3</sup>

Whilst the data suggests that an English mother is fractionally more likely to result in the individuals adopting an exclusively British identity, this is not reflected in relation to those individuals who have an Irish mother.

The overriding conclusion from this particular set of data remains that there is a convergence towards multiple notions of identity for the largest section of this research grouping.

As a final footnote to this particular part of the analysis, it is important to record that the significance of parental places of birth is further called into question by the data relating to siblings amongst the respondents. There are four sets of siblings amongst the respondents. In three of the cases, both siblings adopt very similar labels of identity. However, in the fourth case, in which three siblings were surveyed, this produced three radically different responses. The first identified as Irish only (**ID28**), the second as English and British (**ID08**) and the third selects the labels British, Irish, English, Brummie, European (**ID83**). The significance of this example is that these siblings have the same parents, one of whom was born in Ireland, the other in Birmingham, yet they articulate very different interpretations of their identity. This, I suggest, further undermines the significance, or at the very least, calls into question the value of considerations of parental places of birth for the identity of their children.

Having examined the responses to the survey phase, Chapter Nine offers an analysis of the fifteen in-depth interviews.

### ***References***

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<sup>1</sup> As I record in Chapter Seven, records relating to the ethnic origins of children born in Birmingham demonstrate the high levels of 'Irish' births between 1958 and 1970, when the records were discontinued.

<sup>2</sup> A number of subjects who use the term 'Mixed Race', indicate elsewhere in their responses that they are not what would commonly be perceived to be 'Mixed Race', however this was a term which they felt comfortable with, as it reflected different dimensions of their heritage.

<sup>3</sup> Yuval-Davis, N. & Anthias, F. Woman, Nation, State, 1989, p.9

## ***Chapter Nine: Research Analysis and Findings - Interview Phase***

### ***(9.i) Introduction***

For the purposes and ease of analysis, I concentrate on five principal areas of interest. I begin by examining the responses to questions relating to identity, I explore, not only the labels which the respondents choose to adopt or reject, but also the rationale they offer in support of such approaches. This then forms the basis for an exploration of the individual's perception of a range of influences upon the formation of their identity. I concentrate on four principle areas of interest. Firstly, the role of people, here I adhere to the previously outlined distinction between the roles of parent(s) and others. Secondly, societal and organisational influences, these include factors such as education, religion and access to cultural forms. Thirdly, geographical considerations, including explorations of the influence of Birmingham, access to Ireland and notions of 'home'. Finally, experiences of abuse and discrimination.

I display the research data according to theme, rather than simply, systematically going through the list of participants, stating that x viewed her/himself as Irish and particular significance on the role of her/his maternal grandfather, her/his participation in Irish dancing and annual visits to Ireland. I believe that a thematic approach provides a greater insight into the wider experiences of the research population.

The methodological approach adopted, which divides the questionnaire respondents according to the labels they choose means that there is little to be gained from dwelling on quantitative measurement of responses. Rather, I am principally interested in the qualitative responses of subjects, in particular, their perceptions of specific factors and the rationale they offer. Consequently, I am as interested in the



meaning which the subjects attach to particular events as the overall significance of the events themselves.

I clearly state which subject expresses a particular sentiment and, where a group of respondents offer similar responses I list of the relevant ID numbers in brackets at the end of the paragraph.

Where a respondent uses the name of a family member or friend, this is deleted and replaced by XXXX, together with an explanation of XXXX's relationship to the subject, in order to protect the identity of the respondent.

I refrain from offering findings in relation to each set of influences, preferring to provide a more comprehensive exploration of the overall findings in the concluding chapter, thus avoiding unnecessary repetition.

### ***(9.ii) Section One: Labels of Identity***

This section of the analysis combines the responses to two principal questions from the interview phase; the first offered the same prescriptive list of potential labels, which had formed part of the original questionnaire. Respondents were asked to select which labels they adopt to identify themselves. A second approach, of self-definition, allows them to reinforce their responses to the previous question, or to offer different, personal interpretations of their identity.

Respondents were then asked a series of questions as to why they choose particular labels, reject others and what each of the labels means to them.

In relation to the prescribed list of potential labels, for most respondents, this selection is an organic process, with subjects merely going down the list ascribing the various labels to test their applicability, choosing the:

*"Ones that I think connect myself with, the Afro-Caribbean side, I connect myself with that, the Irish, I connect myself with that, British because I call myself British (rather) than actually English, Mixed race because of having.. a Black Dad and White Mom and Brummie, because I speak like a Brummie". (ID65)*

Similarly ID16 records: "English because I have an English father... the Irish because I've got an Irish mother and the Brummie one because I am from Birmingham."  
**(ID16)**

For ID45, the process of selection is guided by "simple, logical deductions of geographical locations, of birth, life and existence." **(ID45)** He concludes: "It was simply a case of testing their 'emotional' and 'geographical' appropriateness."  
**(ID45)**

ID108, who identifies as 'Mixed Race' expresses concern about selecting a considerable number of the labels: "I thought he'll have a laugh when he sees that". **(ID108)** She also reports having contemplated dismissing all of the other labels, in favour of one which represents her core Identity: "I was gonna diss every single one and put an African." **(ID108)** She concludes: "I'm sure you wanted me to really put down how I do feel". **(ID108)** She ultimately adopted the 'self-ascription' approach.  
**(ID108)**

Respondents were also asked how long it had taken them to decide on the choice of labels in the survey phase. There were two broad responses to this question, firstly, that this was a straightforward process, soliciting responses such as "about five seconds" **(ID45)**, "very little time", "just glanced through them" **(ID109)** and "No hesitation about it". **(ID33)** However, ID33 acknowledges that this process has been made easier by the passage of time:

*"Had it been asked of me as a child, or even a young adolescent, I might have needed time to think about it, because I wouldn't be so clear in my mind then... I probably would still have chosen the label that I ultimately chose, but I probably have to have thought about it more. Whereas at the time of choosing I had no problem about it."* **(ID33)**

Secondly, other respondents report that the process took "quite a while". **(ID110)**

In this particular case, consideration is explained in relation to the subjects' "experiences of people in Northern Ireland not considering themselves Irish".

**(ID110)**

The methodological approach adopted ensures that a third of the subjects identify as 'Irish' only, a third as English or British only and the final third adopt a series of labels to reflect their identity. However, one subject offers significantly different responses to the questions regarding labels, in the different phases of the fieldwork. It would appear that the interview represents the first time that the subject has spoken to anyone, other than family members about her Irish heritage. **(ID88)** This is explained in a subsequent section.

Both fieldwork phases demonstrate that there is no single label or set of labels, which is universally acceptable to the research population. The different phases produced a plethora of labels and combinations of labels. Rather, respondents in both phases identify a range of labels, which they feel reflect their identity.

I deal with the reactions of different respondents to each label in turn, focusing on both those who embrace and reject each label in the same section. I begin with the responses to the 'Irish' national label, before examining responses to 'British', 'English', 'Brummie' and a series of other labels.

## **Irish**

For those individuals who choose 'Irish' only, the attachment to this label and identity appears firm and categorical: "I wouldn't want any other label... The short answer to it, is that I feel Irish, I don't feel that I am anything else". **(ID33)** Similarly, ID72 records that she is "Irish in Heart" and that this attachment is "absolutely a gut feeling thing". **(ID72)** She rationalises: "I think it must be because of my history, and my experiences and what I've picked up... But I'm 55 now, you'd think I've been here a long time, but it's still there". **(ID72)**

ID107's approach is rationalised on the basis of her family's experiences and of being "more proud to be Irish, than we are English." **(ID107)** She states that it is:

*"So ingrained in ya, that, it stays with ya. That's what it is, it's ingrained in ya, it's not something you can just learn, its not something you can just suddenly decide you're gonna be, it's ingrained in ya from day one and its done subtly over the years... so, in the end ya don't know any different."* **(ID107)**

ID74 speaks of attempting to derive a more precise interpretation of this sense of Irishness, although this had created: "Conflict by virtue of where I live, by nature (of) where mom and dad are from. Mom was from the North, and Dad was from the South and I just use the cop-out – 'Irish'." **(ID74)** It is interesting to note that this 'conflict' relates, not to his own place of birth, but those of his parents.

For those who do not select 'Irish' as one of their labels of identity, the same degree of association is not perceived to exist. For example, ID90 records: "I don't think I'd held the same roots as my parents have with Ireland". **(ID90)** She continues, "I did think about Irish, I must have done so, because I thought about Irish now". **(ID90)** She ultimately concludes: "I wouldn't feel I've got the same roots and the

same sense of community... because its not like that over here". **(ID90)** ID90 subsequently went on, during a discussion regarding 'British' and 'English' labels, to pose the question: "Can you be English and Irish? Maybe I thought you could only pick one." **(ID90)** In rationalising this statement, she states: "They sort of, not conflict, can you be English and Irish? I don't know why, usually you are only allowed to pick one." **(ID90)** Faced with a choice, this subject chooses English, which therefore means the exclusion of the 'Irish' label.

The notion of having to make a choice is further underlined by ID72, who subsequently identifies as 'Irish'. Recalling a childhood incident in which she had been asked: "Which is better... England or Ireland? And I still felt loyalty to England, and I said England of course and I remember that wasn't well received". When asked what had happened, she responds: "I don't know, I just remember thinking I hadn't given the right answer." **(ID72)**

Similarly, ID01 states that she does not feel able to identify as 'Irish', inherent in her rationale is this notion of having to make a choice. She states: "At one time I would have said Welsh, but, not any more. But I would never say Irish or Polish, because I'm not, one or the other." **(ID01)** She rejects the notion of embracing a Welsh identity, stating: "Because I'm not... I was born and brought up there, but I'm not Welsh, I haven't got the Welsh culture, its not part of me, it's the Polish and the Irish culture that make up me." **(ID01)** Despite this acknowledgement, she rejects both as a mode of identity and avoids any attempt to derive a hybrid Polish-Irish identity. She concludes: "I'm not Polish, I'm not Irish, I'm a mixture, my culture is a mixture of both and I've taken from both cultures, not just one or the other, so I'm that mixture". **(ID01)** She concludes: "now I would say I am European." **(ID01)**

It is perhaps interesting to note that all three individuals who highlight the notion of having to make a choice, ultimately adopt a single label of identity, ID90, identifying

as 'British', ID72 as 'Irish' and ID01 as 'European'.

As a footnote to the discussion of Irish identity, three subjects articulate that it has recently become more "fashionable" to be 'Irish'. **(ID27)** This is largely bound up in: "Irish cultural things coming to the fore, success of the Irish national soccer team, Irish cyclists winning the Tour de France ...more Irish people wanted to be associated with success." **(ID33)**

There is also a perception that more people now felt comfortable identifying as the local Irish community has moved beyond the post-pub bombings paradigm: "It is easier to be Irish today", thus "people have come out of the woodwork". **(ID33)**

ID107 however offers a note of caution: "It's only... the last ten, fifteen years that it's got... popular to be Irish... it's only the last four years we've had the Parade back, 'cause they wouldn't let us have it. So there was a lot of hatred for us." **(ID107)**

### ***Northern Irish***

Five of the interview subjects have family connections in Northern Ireland, three are from the Roman Catholic tradition and one each from the Church of Ireland and Presbyterian Church traditions. Only one of the five positively adopts 'Northern Irish' as one of their labels of identity, a decision prompted by her relationship with her late grandparents: "I ain't letting them go for no-one... I'm not leaving them behind." **(ID108)**

ID110, whose mother was born in Northern Ireland and is from the Presbyterian tradition, rejects the 'Northern Irish' label on the basis of his place of birth: "I would never actually consider myself as Northern Irish, because I wasn't actually born there, although I've got roots there." **(ID110)** He concludes: "They would always consider themselves British, so not to cause any trouble and not to be on anyone's

side, I think 'cause they were very against the whole 'Northern Irish' and 'Irish' thing." **(ID110)**

For ID109, rejection is guided by his own situation: "I wouldn't call myself Northern Irish, despite having two Irish parents, Northern Irish parents... I've always lived here, this is where I'm from." **(ID109)** ID109 however suggests a possible deeper significance: "As I say I was born here, brought up here, so I consider myself to be English. But I've got two Northern Irish parents, so maybe that makes me Northern Irish, I've never thought of it that way". **(ID109)**

It is interesting to note that both of the subjects who had links to Protestant communities in Northern Ireland reject the 'Northern Irish' label as part of their identity. 'Second Generation Protestant Irish' identity is an area of interest which this research has barely been able to touch upon. Further research is needed into this area.

### ***Who is Irish?***

Subjects were also asked about their perceptions of who is, or can be Irish? This produced a range of responses and definitions.

Two subjects state that they only consider those who had been born in Ireland to be Irish. As ID90 records: "generally, people who were born there, that's how I would sort of classify an Irish person". **(ID90)** Of those who were born in Britain, she states: "they might say 'I'm Irish', it is about how they perceive themselves to be." **(ID90)**

This is supported by ID110 who states that individuals who were born in Britain may identify as 'Irish', but that he "would refer to them as English." **(ID110)** ID110

concludes: "I think to be born somewhere within Great Britain means to be British. And then, to be born in Ireland, would mean you are 'Irish'." **(ID110)**

ID110, who is from one of the Protestant traditions in Northern Ireland, further narrows the conception of who is Irish: "I would consider a 'real Irish person' to be from Southern Ireland, rather than Northern Ireland". **(ID110)** She then narrows this definition further:

*"Whether it's just because I don't know many Catholic people or most of my family are Protestants, I would consider Catholic people more Irish, because, there's the whole affiliation between Sinn Féin and Catholics and them wanting Northern Ireland to be part of Ireland."* **(ID110)**

He concludes: "I would consider anyone from Southern Ireland to be Irish, although, yeah, I would still talk about people from Northern Ireland as being 'Irish', but, I'd use the term quite loosely... I'd probably say it but mean 'Northern Irish'." **(ID110)**

He also perceives this to be the interpretation that these individuals themselves would apply: "a lot of people I've met, if you would call a Northern Irish person 'Irish', they wouldn't be angry, but they may jokingly, say 'I'm not 'Irish', I'm 'English' or 'British', or whatever." **(ID110)**

ID109 also offers a politically based interpretation, stating: "I assume Northern Irish is part of Great Britain, whereas Southern Irish is a separate country." **(ID109)**

ID109 illustrates this in reference to his own solution: "When I say my parents are Irish, most people... in my experience assume I mean Southern Irish and you know, when I say Northern Irish, they go, oh right, as if they hadn't sort of thought of that." **(ID109)**



As a footnote to this discussion, ID107, who has no links with Northern Ireland offers a different perspective on the term 'Northern Irish': "to be Northern Irish is a contradiction in terms, because the people in Northern Ireland are not Irish, they're English, they're ruled by the English, they believe what the English believe, they're not even Catholic". **(ID107)**

Other subjects offer a more inclusive approach, extending the parameters to include "those who were born there" and "any of us who have ancestors that were there." **(ID01)**

These sentiments are echoed by ID65:

*"If you've got Irish parentage, you don't have to be actually living in Ireland to be Irish... because obviously, you've got a link to people through the blood-line, if I wanna... describe myself as 'Irish Caribbean' then nobody should have the right to tell me". **(ID65)***

ID107 also supports such an interpretation, stating: "You can be born on the moon, it's the way of life, your beliefs, where your roots are, where you feel is your 'home'." **(ID107)**

Such responses largely come from those subjects who incorporate some sense of Irishness into their personal identity. Invariably these views are accompanied by the assertion that identification is a matter for the individual: "Who can claim to be Irish? – Whoever feels like it!" **(ID27)** ID27 continues: "I don't think it is down to me to say who is or isn't Irish. I don't think it is down to anyone else, because there is a huge amount of people on this planet who claim to be Irish." **(ID27)**

This approach then sponsors another consideration, if Irish identity can be bequeathed to future generations, just how far can this process extend. ID27 states

that: "I don't know how far back it should go, somebody whose got great, great, great grandparents, but if they did, why should they be stopped?" **(ID27)**

This view is supported by ID45, although he offers one proviso:

*"Anyone who has Irish heritage can, in my view, be Irish, you know, the Americans, five generations down the line... I think that's valid... ethnically, in my view they would be Irish... But if you're saying purely Irish, I am Irish fullstop, I think it's a little bit bizarre for someone who's born and bred here to describe themselves as Irish exclusively and have nothing to do with England. I think that's a strange conclusion, logically to come to". **(ID45)***

He suggests that it is disingenuous for such individuals not to acknowledge both dimensions of their heritage:

*"It maybe shows you a predisposition on their behalf, to view anything connected with England as wrong... as bad... and therefore would describe themselves as 'Irish' and would be vehemently opposed to you describing them as 'Anglo-Irish', which in fact, simple logic tells you if you're born and bred here, your parents are Irish... you're something in-between, you're neither one nor the other, you are a product of those forces, of those mish-mash of things that have all come together. So someone who is in that position describing themselves as purely Irish would belie to me something else – a political agenda." **(ID45)***

Having explored the responses of the interview subjects to the 'Irish' and 'Northern Irish' labels of identity, it is a natural progression to move on to examine attitudes towards 'British' and 'English' labels.

### ***English and/or British?***

Of those interview subjects who include either 'British' or 'English' labels within their personal identity, a number state that they were comfortable adopting either label:

"I don't think I really make a distinction, because it's part of Britain, if I'm English, I'm British". **(ID109)**

Other subjects seek to differentiate between the two labels and their significance for them as individuals. A number clearly state a preference for 'English' as a label of identity. **(ID16, ID88, ID90)** One of key aspects within this analysis is the notion that the 'English' label most accurately located them as individuals within British society. 'English' is seen as a more precise form of identity. ID90 states of 'British', that she is "perfectly happy with it", but contends that it is "too broad, because it included Scottish, Welsh and Irish... Whereas English is what I am!" **(ID90)** ID90 concludes: "the more years I'm here the more English I am". **(ID90)**

This notion of specificity is also stressed by ID16, who describes the term 'British' as "too informal". This issue has been the subject of debate within the home, in which her views on Englishness and Britishness are supported or shaped by her partners' approach: "She'd rather it be English." **(ID16)** She relates her own choice of 'English' to having been born in England, rather than Britain. It appears that ID16 is speaking of two different places, rather than the same place with disputed names.

Similarly, ID88 adopts the term 'English', yet, whilst considering it, she does not concentrate on the virtues of 'English' as a badge of identity, but rather dwells on the deficiencies of 'British' as an appropriate and applicable label: "British sounds too, err, colonial, you know, Irish, no I'm not, because I wasn't born there, I was born in England so, I'm English, not Scottish, Welsh". **(ID88)** Unlike the term 'British', she is comfortable with English, because: "It doesn't carry that arrogance with it."**(ID88)** She explains that 'British' conjures up images of:

*"People who think that they're better than the rest of the world, people who talk about blue blooded British... the very people who for eight hundred years oppressed the Irish. There's something wrong about that.. and I wouldn't want to be seen to be part of that."* **(ID88)**

The notion of Britishness being linked to colonialism is suggested by seven subjects. **(ID33, ID72, ID74, ID88, ID104, ID107, ID110)** This leads ID107 to flatly reject the notion that she is 'British':

*"No, I'm not British. Because if I pronounce myself as British, then that would have to go against all my beliefs and everything, wouldn't it, because... the British rule a part of Ireland that's not theirs. And I don't want to be no part of that, because I do believe that Ireland should be united and it should be for the Irish and it's the British that are withholding that... So no, I can't say I'm British, I can't."* **(ID107)**

Other research subjects, particularly amongst those who do not adopt either 'English' or 'British' amongst their primary labels of identity reinforce the notion that the term 'British' is tarnished by its historical significance. ID72 contends: "Britain is like, I see more as a colonial imperialist thing, the British Empire, and I don't wish to identify with that, because we do have Northern Ireland as one of their little slices". **(ID72)** ID72 argues that the 'English' label is more appealing: "out of British or English, forgetting the fact that in my heart I feel Irish, I would say English... Because, I think, there's... some aspects about English ways of going on, that I quite like." **(ID72)** These are deemed to be "politeness" and "courtesy". **(ID72)** She concludes: "English is more of a cultural thing". **(ID72)**

ID110 also relates his approach back to events in Northern Ireland, but offers a different interpretation:

*"I think it's just because, going to Northern Ireland and having the whole of the troubles thing, people saying I'm not Northern Irish, I'm British, I'm not Irish, I'm English and all this other stuff, it just, maybe in the back of your mind, it opens you up a bit, makes you a bit more aware of what you're calling yourself."*(ID110)

***'It says nothing to me about my life'***

For those who did not select 'English' or 'British' from the original list of labels and did not incorporate either element in their self-identification, their rejection is largely categorical and dismissive, responses include: "didn't cross my mind" (ID27) and: "No, I never did." (ID74) Amongst the principal reasons offered by this grouping is that neither of the 'English' nor the 'British' terms is applicable, or appropriate to them as individuals.

ID74 acknowledges that culturally he is Irish, identifying the "Influence from both parents... strong identity of where they were from, which was imparted onto us. So part of their identity becomes part of us." (ID74) ID74 just stops short of suggesting that he could not be 'British' or 'English', because his parents are both 'Irish'. This, however, is exactly the point made by ID65 who records that: "I don't feel English". (ID65) He rationalises:

*"I think its colour and knowing that I am different. You know at the end of the day that there isn't no English blood in me. Its not like my two parents were English, so there is no English blood in me, I've got Irish blood and West Indian in me."*(ID65)

He did feel comfortable identifying as 'British': "Even though I've lived here all my life, I have, in the past classed myself as a British citizen." **(ID65)** He defines a "British Citizen, as people who haven't actually got their roots in England". **(ID65)** This notion of not fully belonging is echoed, almost word perfectly, by another 'Mixed Race' respondent who rationalises: "I think it's 'cause my mom's Irish and my dad's Jamaican. So where the hell the English bit fits in, I don't know. It only fits in because it's the place I'm born in... It just happens to be my place of birth."**(ID108)** ID107 highlights an issue, which lurks beneath the surface of a number of responses; the perception that her identity is in direct conflict with what they perceive to be their legal position. She begins by stating that she is "Definitely not British", but subsequently records: "I'd never say I was British... technically I am English aren't I? Technically... well, legally. I'm English aren't I? Born here, registered here... legally yeah, but, if I had to choose, no." **(ID107)** This is supported by respondents within both phases, including one survey subject who described her identity as "British (2-Legally), Irish (1)." **(ID69)**

### ***A Confusion between British and English Identity***

A number of responses highlight the apparent widespread confusion as to the meaning, relevance and significance of the labels 'British' and 'English'. This occurs regardless of whether or not the individual chooses these labels. For example, ID01 states: "I'd probably say British, rather than English and I think when I was a child I would say British, not Welsh... I was brought up very much as not liking the English, from my mother and from being Wales". **(ID01)** The respondent then shifts track and swings against 'British' as the preferred term:

*"I don't like calling myself British, British has got this sort of pompousness about it... You know when you go abroad and say you're British, you kind think oh God if I say I am British, I'm not British, my mother would never have called herself British, because she was Irish, my dad's obviously not British, so I don't have that cultural side". (ID01)*

ID01 then comes full circle:

*"I always feel the English, they're very wishy-washy, there's no sort of feeling of national pride, I don't mean in like a bad way... you've got kind of this fascist thing, I wouldn't want that, but I would think that there should be some sense of pride in being English. The Irish are very proud of being Irish and the Welsh are extremely proud of being Welsh, but my partner has got no pride in being English at all." (ID01)*

ID01's apparent confusion reflects a wider dilemma amongst the respondents. As previously outlined, for some subjects, Britishness is bound up in notions of empire, whilst for others, it is the English who were the driving force behind the colonial experiment. This also manifests itself in the oppositional explanations of the merits of 'British' and 'English'. Whilst ID90 feels that 'British' is too "loose" a label to have any significance, ID110 records that the strength of 'British' lies in the fact that: "It's just far more rounded, less about divisions, it's all about one big country". **(ID110)** For ID110, having thought about ticking 'English' and 'Brummie', he concludes: "I just thought stick British." **(ID110)**

This confusion about, and in some cases dislike of the terms 'English' and 'British', together with the reluctance of some individuals to solely identify as 'Irish' leads

some respondents to look to other labels of identity. One potential option lies in local conceptions of identity.

### **'Brummie'**

I set out at the beginning of the research process with a perception that a considerable number of the research population would adopt a local form of identity to reflect their reality of having been born in Birmingham. I perceived that, whilst there may be areas of conflict between national forms of identity, no such conflict exists in respect of the local Birmingham identity and that such a label would be acceptable to the majority of subjects. The reality is that the adoption of a 'Brummie' identity is almost equally problematic.

Only four of the fifteen respondents perceive themselves to be 'Brummies' or identify that they feel a significant degree of association with the city. **(ID45, ID65, ID90, ID108)**

For two of this grouping, this attachment is inevitably bound up in their experiences within the city. As ID65 explains: "it's the only place we've ever lived".**(ID65)**

Similarly, ID90 reports: "that was where I was born and brought up".**(ID90)**

For a third subject, his association is rooted in the fact that he has moved away:

*"Funnily enough I'm probably more identified with being from Birmingham now than I would have been when I was a kid, because, its one of the things that defines you in other people's eyes, is where you're from, whereas when you're living in Birmingham it's not an issue". **(ID45)***

Consequently, other people would say: "he's Irish and he's a Brummie". **(ID45)**

ID45 then quantifies the relationship between the two labels:



*"I would see myself as some sort of Anglo-Irish Brummie whose got attachments to both of those parts of the descriptions of me, being partly Irish and... I see myself as partly Brummie... but, I would describe myself as more Irish than Brummie". (ID45)*

These reservations emanate from his experience of growing up within an Irish community in Birmingham:

*"'Brummie' was used as a derogatory term around where I grew up, a very derogatory term in many ways, amongst even the second generation kids...I always sensed amongst the Irish, our parents generation, they viewed the Brummies as a specifically miserable bunch and it was a sort of jokey thing, but it had negative connotations and I guess that's always something that's sort of stuck with me".*

**(ID45)**

He concludes: "I don't think in Birmingham, amongst the Irish, you would find 'Brummie' being used as a term of endearment, I think it was a jokey, derogatory term and I wouldn't have a great attachment to that phrase." **(ID45)**

The notion that the 'Brummies' were those who lay outside the established Irish communities is reflected in other responses. ID16 states "I see myself as half-Irish' as a 'Brummie/Irish person... I am a Brummie". But she then expresses reservations about adopting such an identity, because of the perception that 'Brummies' are portrayed as a "bit thick". **(ID16)** ID16 is part of a wider grouping of respondents who essentially state that "I am a 'Brummie', but...". ID74 records that: "Growing up and living in Birmingham and always being associated with Birmingham had to become a 'Brummie'." **(ID74)** However he states, that he is 'Irish' and had become a "Brummie by default, by virtue of the fact that I was born in Birmingham." **(ID74)**

He expresses disappointment: "that my parents situated here. Had they remained in Ireland, then I would have been born in Ireland and I would have been Irish through and through." **(ID74)**

ID104 dismisses the 'Brummie' label, describing it as a 'escape hatch': "I think if you put Brummie, you'd be putting British". **(ID104)**

This notion of not belonging in Birmingham is repeated by three subjects who articulate that they are in some ways 'victims' of an accident of birth and that but for circumstances beyond their own control they would have been born in 'Ireland'. **(ID27, ID72, ID74)** As ID27 details: "I don't think my parents would have left if they had choices and opportunities". **(ID27)** He is left wishing that "it had been different and we had been brought up over there", concluding that he had been "very much robbed of choice." **(ID27)** This position is perhaps best summed up by ID72, who points to the term 'Brummie' on the list of labels and proclaims: "never – if I've ticked that then obviously then I'm schizophrenic". **(ID72)** She concludes:

*"I see myself, emotionally, culturally... as Irish... I feel like I happened to have been born in Birmingham, because I was brought up a Catholic, because I had Irish parents... I've always got on alright with people, but in my heart I don't feel a Brummie, it is different to living in Birmingham". **(ID72)***

For ID27, Birmingham provides little more than a geographical location, the term 'Birmingham Irish' is merely a statement about his heritage and current location, rather than a reflection of his emotional attachment to Birmingham: "I don't see myself as being a 'Brummie' at all." **(ID27)**

ID88 is equally dismissive of the notion that she is a 'Brummie', explaining that: "There's a lot about the Birmingham culture that I don't particularly like." **(ID88)**

Similarly, ID107 also rejects the notion that she is a Brummie: "No, No, No, no, nope... under no shape or term do I. 'Cause Brummies are like... they're very selfish people". **(ID107)** However, she adds: "Then again saying that, my mom's a Brummie. I can't actually say I dislike them. I can't can I. But I wouldn't wanna be one." **(ID107)**

ID33 is calmer, yet no less determined in his dismissal of the idea: "No, although I think it would be true to say I have sort of affection for Birmingham, erm, and I suppose I have some awareness of my association with Birmingham". He reaffirms: "I wouldn't put it very high up on the importance rating for me." **(ID33)**

ID01, who was born in Wales, yet has lived in Birmingham for more than twenty years, also states: "I would never consider myself a Brummie". She then provides an interesting insight from a parent's perspective, offering the tacit acknowledgement that "My son, I suppose, is a Brummie, oh god (laughter), I hate to think that". **(ID01)**

The widespread opposition or indifference to the 'Brummie' label is partially created by the aforementioned attitudes of those outside the city. **(ID16, ID109, ID110)**

For ID109, the perception of 'Brummies' as 'thick': "Could be part of the reason why I don't like being labelled a Brummie". **(ID109)**

This is echoed by ID110: "it's just the stereotype we've got", "just of being stupid and I don't know, lazy and whatever". **(ID110)** ID110 also states that the accent "just sounds common", concluding: "I think it has made me more self-conscious and maybe try and adapt my Brummie accent". **(ID110)**

Having set out with the hypothesis that the local label would provide a stable point in the identity of members of the research population, the findings of the fieldwork phase all but conclusively disprove this hypothesis. The Birmingham/'Brummie' label, although being adopted in some form by many of the respondents, does not appear

to occur as a result of any strong emotional attachment to the city. Rather such a label barely commands a stronger sense of association than the previously explored national labels, this leads us to look elsewhere for other significant meaningful notions of identity: multiple labels.

### ***Adoption of Multiple Labels***

The methodological approach adopted necessitates that a significant proportion of respondents adopt multiple identities, with the forms of such identities varying considerably between subjects.

ID65 rationalises the use of a series of labels to reflect different influences upon his life: "I think I've got more than one label... you couldn't look at me and say, your English... other people, they'll be looking at me thinking what different mixes is he?"

#### **(ID65)**

Similarly, ID16 also incorporates different influences, stating: "probably the English first, I was born in England and I was born in Birmingham, I have an Irish mother. Erm, yeah a blend of all three." **(ID16)**

For some, there is an attempt to fuse together two national elements. For example, ID45 successfully combines two labels which reflect both his British and Irish connections and heritage in a form which he feels comfortable with: "I would say Anglo-Irish". **(ID45)** When asked about this term 'Anglo-Irish' the respondent records that: "people don't generally describe themselves (in) geographical, city locations, it's a bigger question; it's which country are you from". **(ID45)** He states that there are other terms that he feels comfortable with, but states that: "It's a commonly used phrase... I could just as easily make a term up and say British-Irish, English-Irish". **(ID45)** ID45 concludes:

*"People tend to know what Anglo-Irish as a term means. British-Irish would be an unusual terminology for the same thing in my eyes... just a commonly used term, it doesn't belie anything or indicate anything... In my experience, its probably the most commonly used term for the whole English stroke Irish thing – the Anglo-Irish question, the Anglo-Irish peace accord". (ID45) <sup>1</sup>*

This represents one of the few respondents who directly attempts to combine two labels, which reflect his dual national connections. For others the search for such a label appears somewhat illusive. ID16 initially expressed a preference for 'English' rather than 'British, but states that she is looking for a term which reflects her duality: "If there would be a terminology that has English stroke Irish... a word made up and it meant English stroke Irish I'd probably fill that." (ID16) When asked whether she could think of one, she replies: "No". (ID16) She later reiterates the desire for: "Something that would mean both... It would just be nice". (ID16)

During the course of this exchange, ID16 states that she has previously used the term 'mongrel', which reflects that she is "half and half", "a mixture of breeds". (ID16) This term is also adopted by a number of survey respondents.

For ID27, his duality is reflected in the term 'Birmingham-Irish'. However, he offers a distinction between being 'Irish' and being 'Birmingham-Irish', stating that it reflects other people's attitudes toward his identity, of: "not being Irish in some respects when you are over there, but not being English when you are over here."(ID27) For ID27, being 'Birmingham-Irish' is like being from: "another county". (ID27) Birmingham is thus the thirty-third county of Ireland.

ID65 also adopts a label which reflects his ethnic heritage, through the label: "Irish-Caribbean". (ID65) He acknowledges a growing sense of this duality: "When I was younger I'd have probably said I was English... not realising the difference, so

growing up, hearing different histories from both sides of your family and realising that there are two different sides.” **(ID65)**

For ID88, this took the form of the label ‘Irish descent’: “Because that’s who I am, that’s what I am, that’s where I am from.” **(ID88)** Whilst this is not strictly a multiple label, it does allow her to acknowledge her duality of reality and heritage:

*“I think I like being Irish descent, because I like the person I’ve become as a result of it. And I like Irish people and I don’t much like English people, compared to Irish people... I don’t know, it is more of a feeling than err, err, a logical analysis... I just like Irish people, I like going to Ireland... So I like being Irish descent”.* **(ID88)**

However, she acknowledges that her approach is dependent upon the perceived standpoint of other individuals: “Depends who I was talking to, if I was talking to somebody who I knew to be a racist pig I would say British. If I was talking to somebody who I felt comfortable with I would probably say Irish descent”. **(ID88)**

This is also evident in ID01’s notion of being ‘European’. This avoids a choice between competing national identities and the chance to exist in a bigger world.

**(ID01)** This also appeals to two other subjects. **(ID27, ID72)** For example, ID27 states: “Sometimes I like to get away from actually being rooted in a label”. **(ID27)**

This is seen to be a condition of modernity: “As time goes on, it is going to become less important to be patriotic.” **(ID27)** He concludes that embracing an European identity allows him to move away from the whole process of labeling, expressing a desire to be: “allowed to roam, rather than labeled and restricted.” **(ID27)**

### ***‘Mixed Race’***

The notion of reflecting different aspects of one’s heritage is also evident in the utilisation of the term ‘Mixed Race’. Five interview subjects suggest that ‘Mixed Race’

is a label that they feel comfortable with. Of these, two are what would commonly be considered to be 'Mixed Race', i.e. one parent 'Black', one parent 'White', in both these cases; one parent born in Ireland, the other in the Caribbean. **(ID65, ID108)**

As ID65 states: "As much as anyone else wants to sort of change the different ways to call 'Mixed Race' people, I call myself 'Mixed Race'... Because I'm a mixture of two sort of people, two races... whether the word 'race' is right". **(ID65)**

ID108 states that her experience has largely been shaped within a 'Mixed Race' environment: "All the aunties, apart from one, married somebody different... mom married a Jamaican, auntie married an Indian, the other auntie married a small island, the other auntie married a Chinese, so in my family... you've got everybody".

**(ID108)** She concludes: "growing up... I just thought all 'Mixed Race' was Irish and Jamaican."**(ID108)** This creates confusion: 'Bloody hell, where do I come from? Frig me, I live in England, Mom's from Ireland, my granddad's from Ireland, me bleedin' Dad's from Jamaica (sic). Where the frig do I fit in? I couldn't fit in at all. So that's probably why I had to look to Africa...' **(ID108)<sup>2</sup>**

However, she emerges with a sense of pride in her culturally diverse experiences: "I just think of my own life and think, nobody would believe that my Mom's Irish and I grew up in an Irish household... and I love Ethiopia and I'm going home to Africa and I live in Birmingham. They just don't, who could know that?" **(ID108)**

Three other respondents adopt the label, 'Mixed Race', two had one parent who was born in Ireland and the other in England, whilst the third's father had been born in Poland. **(ID01, ID16, ID107)** In each case, both parents were 'White'. And in each case, there is a degree of hesitation in suggesting that they are 'Mixed Race'. ID01 states: "I am 'Mixed Race' aren't I, but not 'Mixed Race' in the sense you would normally associate with 'Mixed Race'."**(ID01)**

Similarly, ID107 explains that she is:

*"Mixed Race', because my mom's English and my dad's Irish, so therefore it's not true, full, hundred per cent, but I class myself as 'Irish', because it's a way of life I've chosen, it's... my childhood was there, I was brought up there, my family are Irish, my friends are Irish, everything about me is Irish and the fact that I live here, doesn't change that fact... 'Mixed Race' 'cause basically my Mom's English and I could never turn my back on my Mom."* **(ID107)**

This appears to lift the distinction between 'Irish' and 'British' to the level of racial difference. Two other subjects also refer to the Irish as a 'Race', underlining a perception within a section of the research population, that the Irish are distinct from the English on a basis of more than geographical origin and culture. **(ID27, ID74)**

The apparent applicability of the 'Mixed Race' label is stressed by the fact that nine survey respondents ticked the 'Mixed Race' box. Once again, the vast majority of these respondents were not what would be commonly considered 'Mixed Race'. Such individuals merely appear to be searching for a label, which reflects their duality. 'Mixed Race' is one of a number that fulfils this role.

The discussion regarding identity were continued with reference to a number of other phenomena which required an association with labels of identity.

### ***Passports***

For some respondents, their choice of passport is a simple one. As ID33 states: "I really didn't have to think about it, I just thought that was the passport that was appropriate to me". **(ID33)** He reports that he had previously had a British passport, but now has an Irish passport: "nothing else seemed appropriate". **(ID33)**



Similarly, for those who have taken a British passport, there is an element of surprise that they were being asked the question. A common response is "I don't know, is there some other passport I can get" **(ID109)** or "I didn't realise I could". **(ID110)**

For ID74, the decision to have an Irish passport is part of recognition of his association with Ireland, stemming from his "strong cultural identity and roots".

**(ID74)** This is endorsed by ID45, who remarks that he has a British passport, but that his sister has an Irish passport: "hers would probably be a chosen identity... I would say she would definitely choose having an Irish passport over a UK passport, feeling a stronger emotional attachment." **(ID45)** He speaks of his own decision to take a British passport, as being a matter of "expediency". **(ID45)**

Another subject advocates the ease of using a 'British' passport: "It's great to be British when you're travelling... it saves you from a lot of issues". **(ID108)**

Similarly, ID107, who identifies exclusively as 'Irish' and rejects any suggestion that she is 'British', holds a 'British' passport: "obviously". **(ID107)** She had thought about getting an Irish passport, but felt that: "It just confuses the issue, you know... it is not worth it to be honest... it doesn't happen very often, but occasionally it still happens to my Dad, he does get a very negative response, if you show 'em an Irish passport. It just makes life easier". **(ID107)**

She concludes: "People love the Irish, but every now and again you do get the odd one or two that are a bit like, you know, 'send 'em back, get back you shouldn't be here". **(ID107)**

For ID27, the question of which passport is of little or no concern: "Who cares?" **(ID27)** He offers the admission: "I don't like labels". **(ID27)**

### ***Sport***

Subjects were also asked about their support for Irish and British national sporting

teams. A number identify that they are torn between two or more teams. For example, ID16 states that if: "Ireland's playing; I'd root for them... (but it) brought a bit of a divide, if it was England and Ireland. I'd perhaps root on the Irish side for villainy." **(ID16)** In an interesting juxtaposition, she then states, in reference to the Republic of Ireland, that: "They did better than us". **(ID16)**

ID90 records that this also presents a 'quite difficult' choice, as she feels an 'equal allegiance to them' and that "If Ireland ever play, I like them to do well. I think I'd feel the same for England, now." **(ID90)**

ID45 is also torn, but states: "I'll support Ireland", rationalising this as:

*"A little bit of supporting the under-dog, it's more fun when they win, because everyone expects England to win... as I said on a scale of one to ten, five and a half Irish, so it's just that edge. But I'm not one of these 'anyone but England people'. I'd support England every time, apart from when they are playing Ireland".* **(ID45)**

For others, their responses are backed by greater fervour. ID27 supports "the 'Republic': 'because I am Irish – because I could play for them". **(ID27)** Of the suggestion that he could support England: "It has never crossed my mind, sure why should I?" **(ID27)** This is supported by ID33 who speaks of being "naturally drawn", citing: "I've certainly never felt any feelings for the England team". **(ID33)**

For other subjects, the decision is equally clear-cut: 'England', "partly because the Irish teams are pretty rubbish really, but I would still probably support England. As I said before, I consider myself to be English." **(ID109)** Whilst ID110 remarks in relation to Northern Ireland: "I would cheer for them, but it's not something I would look in the paper to find out results". **(ID110)** In response to the inevitable

question: "If England and Northern Ireland were playing, I don't know who I'd support? Probably, England." **(ID110)**

For ID65, such judgements are governed by complex competing demands: "Cricket, it's the West Indies, in Football its Ireland, Republic of Ireland and in Rugby it's the Republic of Ireland." **(ID65)** Of England, he states: "You know, I like England to do well when they're playing, but my actual allegiance is obviously to the Republic of Ireland." **(ID65)** This has previously prompted a questioning of his identity:

*"I had a heated discussion one time... as to why I support the West Indies in the cricket and Ireland in the football, because I'm English, they were telling me I was English. I was saying, no I'm not, I was born here, but I'm not English. So what are you then. I said 'half-Irish and I'm half-West Indian'. No, but you're English, you were born here". **(ID65)***

### **Census 2001**

In view of the introduction of a separate Irish category within the 2001 Census I included the relevant question in the interview schedule. This was partly to see whether the participants' responses differ because the Census is an official document.

Each subject was given a copy of the ethnic categories for the 2001 Census (See Appendix three).<sup>3</sup> The only guidance given was that they must select one category, from one section only.

Two respondents selected the 'White British' box **(ID90, ID110)**, six chose 'White Irish' **(ID33, ID45, ID72, ID74, ID104, ID107)** and five chose to select their own term within the 'Other' section.<sup>4</sup> Of this latter grouping, one chose 'European', one 'Caribbean-Irish' and another three a label, which acknowledged their perceived

duality, 'Birmingham-Irish', 'Irish descent' and an undetermined label which reflects both dimensions.

For those who selected the 'White Irish' category, three selection strategies are identified, for two respondents there is the unquestioning belief that 'Irish' is the only section they could choose: "Because of what I believe and my morals and everything". **(ID107)**

The second approach is that the Census compilers are attempting to discover the individual's ethnic group/ethnicity, thus: "Within 'White' I would have to take 'Irish', because they are looking for 'ethnic group' and I would definitely describe myself as "Ethnically Irish". **(ID45)** This means that the individual does not have to make any complex decision about whether he feels 'Irish' or 'British', as the compilers are looking for a more basic association. To test this, this subject was asked whether he had thought of choosing "British":

*"If I'm... painted into a corner, as I am with this question, I would err on describing myself as 'Irish', 'cause that's what I think they're asking. Ethnically, I think I'm Irish. If the DNA was to be run, you'd find I had a correlation with tribes of people who were running round the West of Ireland."* **(ID45)**

ID45 had previously identified himself as 'Anglo-Irish', yet in the context of the Census, he selected the 'Irish' box. **(ID45)**

The third approach is that the individual appears to know what her identity is, but appears unsure about articulating this. ID72 indicates that she would tick the 'White-Irish' box **(ID72)**, then began a process of internal rationalisation: "Well I am White... I feel very Irish, even though I wasn't born there. All my experiences, meaningful experiences seem to have been connected in one way or the other with

Ireland and people who are Irish.” **(ID72)** ID72 appears to be asking whether she is, or can be ‘Irish’ and seeking validation of her decision.

For those who utilise the ‘Other Box’ and insert a label, this decision is prompted by a desire to reflect different aspects of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This is evidenced in the use of simple terms ‘Birmingham Irish’ **(ID27)** and ‘Irish-Caribbean’. **(ID65)** For other subjects, this process is a more complex one: “That’s probably where I’d like my word to come in, this mythical word, a combination, cause I’m part of both.” **(ID16)**

For a fourth respondent, use of the ‘Other’ Box’ is rationalised with an acknowledgement that the other categories did not offer an adequate explanation of her background. She does not see herself as ‘Irish’ or ‘Polish’ and concludes that only the ‘European’ label satisfactorily reflects her realities. Although she concludes that this label: “Doesn’t tell anyone anything really”. **(ID01)**

These discussions appear indicative of the position which many of the subject grouping appear to occupy, existing between the Irish and British populations. The fact that five respondents choose to utilise the ‘Other’ boxes offers an intriguing insight into the experience of ‘second generation’ Irish in Britain. This approach ensures that these individuals did not have to make a choice between the central pillars of their lives, avoiding the dilemma of having to choose to be ‘Irish’ or ‘British’ and allowing them to reflect different aspects of their heritage.

The absence of a category which incorporates, both ‘British’ and ‘Irish’ elements appears to force individuals to make a choice between the two poles. This is particularly unfortunate as there are comparable categories for the children of other post-war migrants.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Any problems identifying as 'Irish'?***

Having explored the forms of identity that subjects adopt, I then asked whether subjects had ever had problems identifying as Irish. Whilst a number of respondents were categorical in the fact that they had never felt it necessary to conceal their heritage, the responses of four subjects represent particularly interesting reading.

**(ID45, ID74, ID88, ID107)** Their contributions are primarily shaped by specific experiences or incidents. For example, ID74 cites that the effects of the Birmingham Pub Bombings meant that, in the immediate aftermath, he found it extremely difficult to identify as 'Irish', finding it easier to "blend in". **(ID74)** I explore ID74's experiences in greater detail elsewhere.

Similarly, ID88 cites that in some situations it is necessary to protect oneself, concealing her ethnicity within her employment setting:

*"I work with people who are gay and I like them, but I know there are lots of 'homophobics' (sic). I work with people who are 'black' and I like them, but I know there are a lot of racist people and I work with Asian people and to some extent I would say I am quite racist about Asians... So I know how I feel about Asian people and I feel sure that English people feel far more venomous about Irish people. The more I hear about how English people cannot abide Irish people, I just think, I am in an environment at the moment that has got narrow-minded people and no matter how much they say they're not prejudiced and racist, they are."* **(ID88)**

This prompts the question: what if they found out?

*"It might affect my career development, it would certainly change how people dealt with me at management board meetings and I don't want to bring that on my head,*

*whether it's right or wrong and I'm sure it's wrong... So I just don't tell them... I don't want people to have the power... to make judgements about me, based on their own narrow-minded ignorance, prejudices... they judge me on who I am on and how competent I am. And that's how I'd like it to stay, thank you very much."*

**(ID88)**

Consequently she does not feel comfortable identifying as 'Irish'. Indeed, it would appear that she has not discussed her identity with anyone outside her immediate family.

Whilst ID45 initially states that he "would never avoid mentioning it at all to anyone", but he continues: "If I was in the company of Ulster Unionists in Belfast I may not choose to point it out, but erm, no I've never had an experience where I wouldn't mention it... not yet anyway". **(ID45)** Here ID45 suggests that there are arenas in which he may consider concealing his identity.

### ***Identity changed over time?***

I was also keen to examine whether individuals perceive that their identity has changed over time. Unsurprisingly, responses are clearly divided between those who state that their identity has changed and those who steadfastly felt that their identity had remained exactly the same way.

For ID110, his identity has changed in relation to considerations of 'British' and 'English' labels, with an accompanying acknowledgement that this realignment has not been dramatic. He relates this back to Northern Ireland: "Just everyone talking, troubles really in Ireland and the whole, wanting to be English or part of Ireland."

**(ID110)**

ID33 acknowledges that his perception of his identity has changed with maturity: "When I was younger there might have been some confusion in my mind, probably borne of the experience of the attitudes of other people towards me. As I got older the feeling of being Irish would have got stronger." **(ID33)** Here we not only see evidence of an individual's perception of their identity changing, but also a recognition that the negative responses and reactions of other people, has helped strengthen this perception. He states: "I feel Irish, I don't feel English, I feel more affinity with fellow Irish people than I do with people who are not Irish, but were born in the same place as I was." **(ID33)** This interaction of age and attitude is also stressed by ID65: "when I was younger, I probably didn't think about it, cause, when I was younger, I never had many comments about it, it's as I've got older that people have asked... then you become more aware of the difference to other people." **(ID65)**

ID72 also cites that her awareness has been "more recent":

*"I'm now aware of what I feel about my identity... I don't know how my identity was before, I think it was a mish-mash, not being a very aware person, just racing through life, didn't really think too much about it, what I was doing was making Irish connections".* **(ID72)**

A common rationale for this sense of evolution is a growing sense of self-confidence. **(ID27, ID74, ID33)** As ID74 concludes, he is now ready to: "Stand up and be counted". **(ID74)** This is further stressed by ID01 who states of her identity: "it was into my twenties, before I decided that". **(ID01)** ID01 paints a picture of her constantly shifting identity, responding to new environments and different stimuli,



she asserts: "Yeah, its definitely changed... at one time, it was Welsh, then you say I'm Polish-Irish and now its much more, much broader than that". **(ID01)**

ID90 recounts the opposite scenario, that as she has grown older: "I would have considered myself more Irish when I was growing up, but now that I've got my own family, you know, I see myself as British." **(ID90)** She states, that her grandmother had died and that she had "moved away from that period of my life... I think we're more English now really." **(ID90)**

For other subjects, there is an acknowledgement that their identity has remained all but fixed during the course of their lives, regardless of whether the individual saw her/himself as being 'Irish', 'British' or 'English'. As ID107 states, she has always viewed herself as being 'Irish':

*"No, no, I think the day I was born I had a shamrock in my hand and the day I die I will. I've never, ever classed myself as British.... Even as a child, I've never thought of England or Birmingham as my 'home', never, ever. It's always been that side, my dad's side, always and I think it always will be, it won't change."* **(ID107)**

### ***(9.iii) People: The Influence of Family and 'Significant Others' in the construction of Identity***

It is now imperative to examine the influence of the factors which help shape the individuals' perceptions of themselves, in order to unravel why individuals perceive themselves to be 'Irish', 'English', 'British' or 'Irish-Caribbean' and what significance each attaches to these labels. I begin by exploring the role of other people.

### ***Relationships with Parents***

The relationships between the subjects and their parent(s) covers the whole gamut of potential experience. For some childhood and adolescence was a period of comfort, whilst for others it was a time of uncertainty.

ID110 identifies that his parents have given him a "good upbringing". **(ID110)**

Similarly, ID45 speaks of growing up with "non-stereotypical Irish immigrants", who provided him with a "very good" childhood, which was characterised by "little tension or conflict". **(ID45)**

Three subjects report that their parents had separated. **(ID65, ID108, ID109)** For ID65, this split is described as "amicable", allowing him to see both parents, who both remained in Birmingham. **(ID65)**

ID109 speaks of his parents having "rather a dodgy relationship". **(ID109)** He reflects that they "argued quite a bit", but that they always "had our best interests at heart". **(ID109)**

For ID108, her parents' relationship appears far more traumatic: "I grew up in an environment with my dad battering my mom every five minutes and my mom becoming an 'alcie' (Alcoholic)". **(ID108)** Her parents separated when she was six years old: "that was the last time I saw my dad and I hated him". **(ID108)** ID108 also speaks of "hating" her mother as a teenager", but records that this relationship has evolved: "now, I am woman, me and my mom is sweet ". **(ID108)**

For all other subjects, their parents remained together, although for some, this passage was not as smooth as that described by ID65 above. ID72, who spent part of her childhood in Ireland, due to a family illness, paints a disjointed picture of domestic life, speaking of a "fairly turbulent, rocky household, full of many tensions". **(ID72)** This led to her taking on the role of 'peacemaker' within the home. **(ID72)**

She concludes that her parents: "weren't well matched in terms of their personalities" and that they stayed together simply because it "wasn't done". **(ID72)**

### ***Centrality of Parents***

The interview responses clearly underline the centrality of parents in processes of identity formation, as when asked to identify specific factors which had helped shape their identity, ten subjects cite parent(s) as the primary influence. **(ID01, ID27, ID45, ID65, ID90, ID107, ID104, ID107, ID109, ID110)** ID01 states that the biggest influence was:

*"The fact that my parents were immigrants and seeing their struggle... I felt I had to succeed because they'd struggled so much and they'd been through such awful things to get where they were, then watching them work hard and provide stuff for us and give up things themselves". **(ID01)***

Other subjects place an emphasis on the importance of the families, ID110 speaks of coming from a "Very close, very nice, loving family" and having had a "model upbringing". **(ID110)**

ID107 emphasises her "close-knit" family: "Family, religion, your mom and dad and your grandparents, they were your priorities. I prefer it the old way." **(ID107)** She perceives that this is rooted in a sense of Irishness: "I think we bring our kids up differently." **(ID107)** By comparison, the English "live in their little cellular families" and this "is totally opposite to the way we think". **(ID107)**

### ***Closer to One Parent***

Some respondents speak of being closer to one parent. For example, ID107 records that her “biggest influence was my dad, definitely, he was the one that’s moulded me into what I am.” **(ID107)** She continues:

*“I idolised my dad. I remember him always having a drink on him and not coming home, but in my eyes, I still idolised him... I think I liked his way of life... I don’t really get on with me Mom, but I get on with me dad, my dad’s passed his values down to me”. **(ID107)***

This is reflected in the perception that, of his children:

*“He does respect me the most, because out of all his daughters, I’m the only one that’s held on to my beliefs and to my values and I still think as Ireland as my ‘home’... I’ve still got connections...and I still hold onto my Irish beliefs, whereas as my sisters didn’t.” **(ID107)***

ID16 records that: “there was more of a leaning to my mother than my dad, as a little girl, probably more to my dad, but as I started growing up then, I distanced myself, or he did really... I love them for different reasons.” **(ID16)** She concludes, her mother “was very proud of her Irishness and I am proud to be part of it.” **(ID16)** Both ID16 and ID107 incorporate an Irish dimension within their personal labels of identity.

One rationale offered to explain such leanings relate to their parents’ roles within the family. For a number of subjects, the fact that their parents occupied traditional, gendered roles, with the father working and mother staying at home affected which

parent they spent the most time with: "Mom mainly looked after us when we were young". **(ID65)** Similarly, ID01 states that they spent more time with their mother, simply because "she was at home". **(ID01)** She concludes that family life was: "Very traditional, Mum didn't work, stayed at home and looked after us". **(ID01)** This is supported by ID88, who states of her father:

*"He really struggled and strived and worked really hard, two jobs and had eight children... he was all in for a good address, a good education, I've been poor, I've had to struggle, I've known want and you don't know what's like and you better persevere". **(ID88)***

### ***Discipline***

For one subject in particular, her relationships with her parents are heavily shaped by the question of discipline. For ID88, her father was seen as the upholder of discipline, whilst her mother appeared more laid back, representing a parental 'good cop, bad cop'. She later discovered that her father was merely enforcing the rules as devised by her mother:

*"It wasn't what he truly believed in and because he was quite awkward about it, applying those standards and morals and rules, he did it in a fairly clumsy, aggressive way. Then we were always quite frightened of Dad. We never knew until he died and we became adults and worked it all out for ourselves that actually Mom had instigated the punishment". **(ID88)***

She concludes: "because he was imposing the rules that she was familiar with, he didn't know how to do it and... he swung from quite a passive person, to try and be

assertive and he swung into the aggressive and as a child all I could see was the aggressive." **(ID88)** ID88 perceives that this led to alienation: "If it meant conversing with dad I just didn't do it." **(ID88)** Ironically, this distance drew her closer to her mother: "I was Mom's blue-eyed girl". **(ID88)**

Discipline is a theme which repeatedly arose. ID01 identifies that her parents were "both disciplinarians", although she felt that her mother was "stricter", because she didn't have a "sense of fun": "I see that in a lot of Irish, Irish women I think especially, life is far more fierce, I suppose it had to do with, scrimping the money". **(ID01)**

ID108 and a number of subjects offer a longer-term perspective, whilst describing her father as a "merciless man", she affirms: "I'm glad for it now, you know..." 'I thank him for the little discipline he give me." **(ID108)**

### ***Awareness of Parent's Ethnicity***

Subjects were also asked about their awareness of their parent's ethnicity during childhood, two subjects refer directly to their point of first realisation:

*"I was probably about five or six... somebody on the bus in Birmingham saying to my mother: 'oh you're Irish... what part of Ireland are you from?' and I turned to my mum and said, Mum, you're Irish, she hadn't ... given me any grounding... I couldn't see her accent being any different from my fathers... I hadn't realised."* **(ID16)**

ID65 similarly recalls: "about eight or nine, you start to realise that there are some differences... your cousins used to come over from Ireland... God their accents are strange". **(ID65)** This awareness is also rooted in the perceived "friction... between the families": "I think it was because our dad was Black. Even though the Black

people and the Irish people seemed to be treated fairly much the same when they came over to England in the early days, it was still friction between the older ones."

**(ID65)**

ID109 states of having 'Irish' parents: "I was aware of it, but it was perfectly normal, I didn't feel it made me stick out in any way." **(ID109)** He concludes: "I don't really have anything to say about that because it was never a problem at all, I mean most people probably didn't know I had Irish parents, but if I did tell anyone, that would be the end of it." **(ID109)**

Another subject simply reports that he has always been aware: "'cause we've always been to Ireland, like since I was six months old possibly... every year, if not twice a year." **(ID110)**

Some subjects speak of a sense of commonality between their parents, especially where both partners had been born in Ireland. ID45 speaks of his parents having known each other as children and having met up in England. Such a sense of commonality is also reported by those with parents from different ethnic groups.

**(ID01, ID65)** For example, ID01 makes references to the similarity between her father and mother's backgrounds in rural Poland and Ireland, whilst ID65 suggests that his parents: "shared the same sort of experiences when they first got to England... No Blacks, No Travellers, No Irish'." **(ID65)**

ID45 brought analysis of his parents' identity up to date:

*"I think my mother would be more towards my view, she would see herself as having adopted and adapted towards English practices and lifestyles over the years... I think to some degree, my mom and dad would describe themselves as Irish, but I think you could talk to my mother and persuade her that she had some sort of*

*English (pause) identity on her side, my dad would, I don't think he'd really agree at all."* **(ID45)**

ID107 remarks that her father still "feels like a visitor", despite having lived in Birmingham for more than thirty years. **(ID107)**

ID108 offers an insight in the identity of members of her extended family. She states that her mother was born Belfast, whilst her mother's younger siblings were born in Birmingham, she concludes that: "the ones who were born here, were more Irish than the ones who come over here, 'cause they're trying to fit in to English culture". **(ID108)**

Amongst the most interesting contributions on this subject are supplied by ID109 and ID110, both of whose parents are drawn from one of the Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. ID109 states:

*"They both consider themselves to be 'Irish', because they grew up in Ireland... I mean they're from Ireland, all be it Northern Ireland. Yeah, I consider Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland to be part of Ireland, I don't know if everybody else does."* **(ID109)**

When asked whether these views are shared by his parents, he concludes: "Yes, I think so, no I'm sure they would, Northern Irish, but British. I mean they're both Protestant, rather than Catholic." **(ID109)**

An awareness of one's parent's ethnicity is undoubtedly partially tied up in the experience of life within the home and of their parents talking about Ireland. For example, ID72 identifies that her mother talked about Ireland, folklore, "stories round the fire", family experiences and Irish history. She concludes: "I couldn't get



enough of it". **(ID72)** ID72 also suggests that whilst her mother talked about Ireland, her father "hinted at it". **(ID72)** For ID108's mother "Ireland don't come up into the conversation (sic)". **(ID108)**

### ***Wider Parental Influence***

As I articulate in Chapter Three, parents not only directly impact upon the identity of the individual, but also control access to other phenomena. In relation to education, a small number of respondents identify that their parents pushed them to succeed. **(ID01, ID27, ID45)** Inherent in these accounts is the notion of grasping what had not previously been available: "I think I see it now as being a child of immigrant parents, my parents certainly wanted better for us than they ever got and therefore we were pushed to make sure we passed exams". **(ID01)** She however acknowledges that: "they didn't understand the system very well, they just went along with whatever they were told". **(ID01)**

This is supported by ID45, who records, that his own parents were: "Unfocused, didn't know how the world worked, but always were on to me, my brother and sister, the general direction, stay on at school as long as you can. So we were helped and supported, but without focus". **(ID45)**

Similarly, parents play a key role in facilitating access to Irish cultural forms. For example, ID45's father afforded access to a local GAA club, whilst other parents encouraged their children to attend local Irish dancing schools. **(ID16, ID45, ID72, ID74, ID104, ID107)** ID27 identifies that his parent(s) were responsible for nurturing a notion of his heritage and "instilling a sense of identity". **(ID27)**

## ***Other People***

Whilst, as I have argued parent(s) represent the primary influence, there are a number of other individuals, who at different points in the lives of the individual, impact significantly upon that individual's perception of their identity.

### ***'Significant Others'***

A considerable number of respondents identify a specific individual with whom they forged a strong bond and who it is perceived has had a particular impact upon her/his identity. **(ID16, ID45, ID72, ID90, ID107, ID108, ID110)** I classify these individuals as 'Significant Others'. Such individuals are the focus of considerable discussion, with some subjects moved to the point of near adoration.

The 'Significant Other' provides a further layer of practical and emotional support during childhood, in some cases acting as a parental substitute. Primary amongst such individuals are grandparents. **(ID45, ID90, ID72, ID107, ID108)** ID108 speaks at length of her turbulent homelife, concluding: "We, spent half of our time with granny and granddad". She continues "I grew up with 'em, they was my life, my granny, my granddad was my life". **(ID108)** ID108 depicts her grandparents as acting as surrogate parents:

*"My relationship was more with my granny and granddad, because my dad, I never liked him, 'cause I felt like he never liked me... he used to beat me all the time for wetting the bed, I think that was why I hated him really". **(ID108)***

ID108 confirms "my granddad is my dad, even though my dad was there". **(ID108)** ID108's grandfather is variously described as "my heart-throb", "a beautiful happy

man" and "the best man in the world". **(ID108)** His effect is such that she states:  
"I rate men after my granddad". **(ID108)**

The nature of ID90's relationship with her grandmother is stressed by her reaction to her grandmother's death. ID90, who does not now identify as 'Irish' and speaks of growing more distant from a sense of Irishness, following her grandmother's death. She concludes, it: "just wasn't the same for me". **(ID90)**

Similarly, ID72, who spent a period living with her grandparents in Ireland, speaks of "how much I loved gran" describing their "lovely relationship" and stating: "I trusted her, I've got such lovely memories of her". **(ID72)**

ID45 cites the role of his maternal grandmother as *the* primary influence upon his life:

*"My grandmother and my mother and my father in that order... My grandmother because ... she was a very remarkably liberal woman... she was (a) very balanced human being and a good person to talk to... it was like having a second Mum."*  
**(ID45)**

He continues:

*"My granny was the one who taught me to read, she taught me to write, do sums, I remember going to school on the first day, I could read and write, I could do my ten times table... I presume I learnt nothing at school for the first two years, because she had taught me... It was like having a full-time paid nanny".* **(ID45)**

For other subjects, the role of 'Significant Other' was taken on by an extended family member. **(ID16, ID107, ID108, ID110)** ID110 speaks of an aunt, who never

had children, so they “were like her adopted children, she always spoilt us”.

**(ID110)**

For ID107, her ‘significant other’ was an aunt who “was like a second mom to me, because I don’t really get on with my own mother... I worshipped her, I’d do anything for her.” **(ID107)** She states: “if ever there was anything wrong, it was her, not me Mom, it was her, I could phone up and talk to, because she never judged me... she always understood me”. **(ID107)** This relationship was such that “she was so close to me at that stage, when she died I just fell apart”. It was the “final straw”, culminating in a “breakdown”. **(ID107)**

Whilst highlighting the positive effects of particular family members, it is important to acknowledge that subjects potentially have two sets of extended families. Whilst a number of the respondents identify good relationships with both sets of extended families, four subjects report that they had had little or no contact with one side of their families. The reasons for this absence range from family disputes to distance. For ID88, a family dispute which precipitated her father’s emigration meant that there were no childhood visits to Ireland and no contact with her father’s family. This distance only increased upon his death: “I decided after he died that I wasn’t going to have anything to do with that side of the family” **(ID88)**

As previously intimated, ID108’s relationship with her father is such that she simply states: “I don’t see his side influencing me at all.” **(ID108)**

Similarly ID107 states: “I was never close to me Mom’s side”. **(ID107)** This side is perceived to be the ‘English’ side: “we’re like strangers, we’ve nothing in common... because we were brought up differently”. **(ID107)** The lack of access to the non-Irish side may mean that the individual is denied experiences which may have reinforced other aspects of her identity and ensures a greater focus on the Irish side.

## ***Siblings***

As one might expect the respondents' relationships with their siblings cover a range of experiences. For some, these are characterised by fondness and even adoration **(ID01, ID16)**, whilst others speak of never having "formed a bond". **(ID72, ID108)**

ID88 perceives that her experiences of her siblings were shaped by her position within the family. She was: "in the middle, I think I'm the only person who gets on with those people". **(ID88)** Whilst others engaged in "quite a lot of vying for position for Dad's attention, but because I didn't vie... I wasn't seen as a competitor." **(ID88)**

Two subjects simply state that they felt their siblings' identities replicate their own, concluding: "I would label him English, British" **(ID109)** and "I think he's the same virtually as me". **(ID110)**

For some respondents, their siblings perform a specific role in relation to the formation of their identity. ID45 measures his own identity against that of his sister, stating that he: "will only identify herself as Irish, I will recognise that I was born here, but I have my roots, but she will not accept that at all." **(ID45)** He rationalises:

*"If you were to ask my sister whether or not she was Irish, English, Anglo-Irish or, if you are taking Anglo-Irish as the mid third... she would be more... towards the Irish end I think and she would consider herself emotionally and feel more emotional attachment". **(ID45)**<sup>6</sup>*

ID107 also plots her identity in relation to her siblings: "out of all of my sisters and my family, it's me that's held on to it most". **(ID107)** She concludes: "The way my

older sister dealt with it was, she just denied everything, she just became one of the girls, but even when I was at secondary school, I still held on, I was proud that my dad was Irish". **(ID107)**

### ***Partner***

Having concentrated on family members, it is important to acknowledge that the subject's relationship with their partner(s) can profoundly impact upon the individual's perception of their identity. Of the interview subjects, eight have partners **(ID01, ID16, ID33, ID45, ID74, ID88, ID90, ID107)**, whilst a further three make reference to previous partners. **(ID72, ID104, ID108)**

Five of these have partners who had been born in Britain and all of whom are described as 'English'. **(ID01, ID16, ID74, ID88, ID107)** Three have partners whom they describe as 'Irish', two of these had been born in Ireland, the other in Birmingham. **(ID33, ID45, ID90)**

For the former grouping, emphasis is placed upon the fact that their partners were 'English', not 'British' **(ID16)** or in the words of ID01: "totally English". **(ID01)**

Once again this poses the question of whether this is sponsored by concerns about Northern Ireland, colonialism or perceived 'Crises of Britishness'. ID01 concludes that her partner is "totally different", a difference compounded by the fact that her partner is a "Non-Catholic". **(ID01)** ID01 perceives that these differences display themselves, at least superficially, in her partner's attitude towards her identity and that of their child: "He just thinks we're all a bit weird, a bit mad, just goes along with whatever, but feels its important that my son knows about his heritage". **(ID01)**

This notion of difference is more apparent in the thoughts of ID88 who states that her partner is "true-blue blood English and I don't think she particularly likes the Irish". **(ID88)**

Similarly, ID16 reports that her partner appears to question her identity: "He thinks I go over the top, the OTT business with the half-Irish, but I think I do it for villainy."

**(ID16)** She explains: "Because I am a Brummie, my mum was Irish... Dad's Birmingham and I was born in England, so he can't see..." **(ID16)** To counterbalance this, ID74 states that his partner "recognises the importance" of his identity to him as an individual. **(ID74)**

ID107 professes of her current partner that: "He's English, but he's lovely... he classes himself as a 'Plastic Paddy', because I've pulled him in, to my way of life".

**(ID107)**

For those who have an 'Irish' partner, discussions are dominated by the notion of commonality, which is rooted in their common ethnicity and background. ID90 notes that the fact that her partner was born in Ireland and that this: "Definitely had an effect" in the development of their relationship. **(ID90)**

Similarly, ID72, states of a former partner, who was 'Second generation Irish', there was "quite a connection there" in relation to "the humour, erm, common understandings about... the Irish way of going on". **(ID72)** Indeed, this commonality presented a problem when her partner joined the Territorial Army: "well, you know, he'd joined the bloody British army". **(ID72)** The situation in Northern Ireland made this somewhat problematic for the subject.

Commonality is also stressed by ID45, whose partner was born in Birmingham with parental links to 'Ireland':

*"I guess we had a lot more in common, similar experiences, displacement, moving away, attachment for what you'd left, very strong, close-knit families... maybe the psychological fact that we had so much in common, was one of the things bound us together originally... it helps."* **(ID45)**

He concludes: "its one of many, many variables that would have had to come together". **(ID45)** ID45 also offers a comparative analysis of his sense of identity in relation to that of his partner: "on a scale of one to ten, one equalling 'English' and ten equalling 'Irish'", he would put himself as 5.5 and his partner as 4.5. **(ID45)** Thus signalling that he views himself as having a stronger sense of Irish identity.

ID107 states of her experience with a previous 'Irish' partner: "I don't know whether I choose it or whether it's a subconscious thing". **(ID107)** She concludes: "like comes to like", "same values, same sense of humour". **(ID107)**

Similarly, ID33 reflects upon his relationship with a 'Born in Ireland' partner: "I suppose it was... a plus point, in my favour as she was concerned." **(ID33)**

### ***Relationships with Partner's Family***

Discussion also centred on the respondent's relationship with their partner's family. For those who had partners from 'Irish families', there is once again an emphasis on commonality: "I understand his family". **(ID90)** Another speaks of enjoying the company of both sets of parents, describing their relationship as "very strong". **(ID45)**

ID01, whose partner is 'English' speaks glowingly of her relationship with her partner's parents, describing them as: "Very good and very kind to me" **(ID01)**

Other accounts are shaped by past and current tensions. **(ID74, ID88)** One respondent reports the "shock horror" of his future spouse's parents at "meeting an



Irish Catholic. They actively told their daughter she would be like a rabbit for the rest of her child-bearing days, and she would breed as such as." **(ID74)** They also made assumptions about the respondent working in the construction industry or on the buses: "they don't equate intelligence and academic capabilities with Irish people." **(ID74)** Despite the initial opposition, this relationship has improved: "As times go on, I'm very much part of that family." **(ID74)**

Similarly, ID88 reports that her partner's mother: "abhors the Irish, absolutely cannot stand the Irish, so I don't push it down her throat". **(ID88)** She continues:

*"I remember one time when we came back from Ireland, I had bought a book on the potato famine, she (her partner) was so impressed by it that she lent it to his mother... She read it and she said, 'Yes, it was very sad, but I still don't like the Irish'."* **(ID88)**

This prompted ID88 to ask her own mother about such attitudes: "there's a lot of English people who are true English people, if you like, that just don't like the Irish." **(ID88)** The significance of such attitudes lies in the effect they have upon the individual in reinforcing other sources of questioning within society and the effect upon any children within these relationships. It is to the latter subject, that I now turn.

### ***Children***

Ten interview subjects had children. **(ID01, ID16, ID33, ID45, ID72, ID74, ID90, ID104, ID107, ID108)** The subjects' perceptions of their children's identity reflect a myriad of different interpretations of identity. For ID33 there is no hesitation, stating: "with a single word 'Irish'." **(ID33)** Similarly, ID107 states: "so

we do class ourselves, even my children do, they class themselves more as Irish than English, it was just the way we was brought up.” **(ID107)** She continues:

*“My children are actually Irish descent, technically they’re Irish descent, but if you ever ask my children are you English or Irish, my children will say Irish. Because I don’t think it matters where you are born, its how you are brought up, again it goes back to what you believe in”.* **(ID107)**

ID107 continues:

*“My children are very culturally Irish... To be honest, if I never took my children ‘home’ ever, I’d still drum into them that they’re Irish, that is where you are from, don’t ever forget it... doesn’t matter where you’re born, it’s what you are that’s important”.* **(ID107)**

For ID01, her son’s position is not as clear-cut: “I suppose if I was asked I would say he was English, but, no, I wouldn’t say that, I would say he was British”. Her son states: “I am half-English, and a quarter Irish, and a quarter Polish, aren’t I?” **(ID01)**

A number of individuals state that they have involved their children in Irish cultural activities. **(ID01, ID16, ID45, ID107)** For example, ID01 perceives that her own child has a much greater degree of access to aspects of Irish culture than she had, predominantly because: “We’ve got an easier existence, than my parents had.”**(ID01)** There is however an acknowledgement that decisions regarding involvement ultimately lies with the child: “He’s got access, whether he takes it up is a different thing.” **(ID01)**

ID45 is also quick to point out that this is the child's decision: "It's not any social sculpting by granny or anything". **(ID45)**

This notion of child-centred choice is echoed by ID90, who refers to her child's experiences at school, noting that the majority of children are from Irish families, thus creating:

*"Quite a strong Irish community there, even with people like me who are parents, they probably keep up the Irish tradition more so than me. I know a lot of children who do go to tin whistle lessons and accordion and do Irish dancing and that, so probably not so much our children. That's mainly because they haven't been interested. If they wanted to then we would encourage them."* **(ID90)**

In a number of cases, respondents identify that their children are aware of their ethnic heritage:

*"If he meets someone who is Irish, he will say his nan is, I think basically because of my Mom's nature, and the fact that my lads had more connection with her – she looked after them when I went back to work. She was always their favourite nan. It wouldn't have mattered if she was Icelandic, whatever she was, but because she was Irish, yeah they have got that link".* **(ID16)**

ID16 states that her eldest son has thought of living in Ireland and spoke of his "great affinity", whilst her youngest son simply states: "I am not Irish". **(ID16)**

Whilst, some respondents report that their children embrace some sense of their Irish connections, others express disappointment at their children's failure to do so.

As ID72 states of her teenage son: "He knows how centred I feel in terms of my

Irishness... I think its made him feel, 'well, I don't want to be Irish'... and 'I don't feel like you do about Ireland... I feel fairly British". **(ID72)** She states: "I'd have liked him to have joined and become an Irish dancer", but she concludes: "In terms of being Irish he doesn't feel the same connection and why should he? And I don't try to make him. But I'm a little disappointed (whispered)." **(ID72)**

ID107 affirms that she has made a conscious decision to socialise her children as Irish: "I want them to have something to hold onto, I want them to remember something". **(ID107)** She concludes: "We are very Irish, I'm sorry but we are". **(ID107)**

Inherent in a number of responses is the notion that their children are less Irish than themselves and that they, as individuals, represent their children's link with Ireland. Tacit within this is the acknowledgement that their children are living in Britain and that they should seek to integrate. The natural conclusion to this is that it is difficult to sustain a sense of Irish ethnic identity in Birmingham much beyond the 'second generation'. This is underlined time and time again:

*"They're English really, but they've obviously got an Irish background. They know a lot of Irish people, their grandparents are still alive, you know, they're still a little bit a part of Irish culture, not as much as me and certainly not as much as the generation in front of me."* **(ID90)**

It is apparent that the same attitudes are being replicated by the research population in relation to their children's identity as had been displayed towards members of the research population by those who were born in Ireland. **(ID01, ID45, ID74, ID90, ID108)** The suggestion that their children are not properly 'Irish' reinforces the notion of hierarchies of Irishness. As ID45 accords: "As they go through the

generational thing it will become more diluted". **(ID45)** She continues:

*"She knows about Ireland, her grannies and granddads are Irish, I'd say she's probably one step removed from me, which in fact she is, she's going back two generations to her Irish origin, but she will be conscious of it"* **(ID45)**

The reasons for the differing attitudes and actions of parents requires investigation as part of a large-scale research project to examine identity formation processes in relation to the third and subsequent generations. There is an underlying suggestion that Irish identity cannot be passed on beyond the 'second generation'.

### ***Friends***

The other grouping to fundamentally influence an individual's identity is friends. A number of subjects, particularly amongst those who perceive themselves to have grown up in 'Irish areas', identify that a significant number of their friends were from similar family backgrounds. As ID45 states of his own experiences of school, the:

*"Kids were from the same background, some of them might be from Selly Oak or whatever, but they were all from Irish communities and went to Irish junior schools and all their parents were Irish and the kids they hung out with were Irish descent."*

**(ID45)**

This link between location, school and the available pool of friends, is also stressed by ID72, who refers to having had two close friends who were 'Irish', which she acknowledges was: "to be expected", because she attended a Roman Catholic School. **(ID72)**

This is reinforced by ID107: "Even over here the majority of my friends are Irish, I don't know if its because I choose it that way, or whether it just happens." **(ID107)**

A number of subjects state that they feel that they are drawn to other Irish people as friends. For example, ID16, who identifies that during childhood she had had "perhaps more English than Irish" friends, remarks that she is "gravitating back again", drawn by a perceived commonality and a "sense of belonging". **(ID16)**

The notion of common ground is also identified by ID45, who states that during childhood the majority of his friends had been from Irish families and that in adulthood he has become friends with a number of other 'Irish' people. He reflects that these individuals would have been aware of his background: "I would imagine that was something they felt they had in common with me". **(ID45)**

This is supported by ID27 who states: "I just sort of end with a natural group of people: 'birds of a feather'." **(ID27)** ID27 concludes that one of his biggest influences has been: "Mixing with other good children who had the same done to them." **(ID27)**

Other subjects disclose that they have had friends who are from similar family backgrounds, however they do not accord great significance to this factor in their friendship: "I certainly didn't seek out people who had the same background as me". **(ID45, ID109, ID110)**

Having examined the role of individuals within the processes of identity formation, I now move on to explore the significance of a number of societal phenomena.

## ***(9.iv) Societal Influences upon Identity Construction***

### ***Education***

The interview subjects reflect the broader research population, being drawn from those who have attended state and private, Roman Catholic, Church of England and non-denominational schools. Subjects report a wide-ranging experience of the education system.

### ***Schools***

Subjects suggest three distinct rationales for their attendance at a particular school: they attended the nearest school, the nearest denominational school, or that the school was chosen according to educational performance.

The majority of subjects recall positive early educational experiences, with references to the school: "Being a nice, warm place" **(ID45)** and of holding onto "Good memories". **(ID01)** However, whilst highlighting its warmth, ID45 acknowledges attending an "Enormously over-stretched school". **(ID45)**

A number of subjects report that their schools were heavily characterised by their religious affiliation. **(ID01, ID16, ID27, ID45, ID74, ID107)** There are references to schools being "Very Catholic" **(ID01)**, to the "Formidable" presence of nuns **(ID16)** and of being "Dragged out for masses, Benediction". **(ID45)** For others, religion was not so obvious, ID109 refers to a Church of England chapel, but affirms: "Religious education wasn't really based on Christianity, I think it was a bit broader than that." **(ID109)**

Those subjects who attended Church of England and non-denominational schools can be crudely be divided into two groupings. Those who were members of the different Protestant faiths and those who were nominally, or by faith, Roman Catholic.

For those who were from the Roman Catholic tradition, attendance at Church of England school was perceived to create a further arena for potential conflict. **(ID16, ID27, ID33, ID65)** ID33 identifies that as one of the few Roman Catholic pupils at a local Grammar school, he “felt the odd one out. In those days, if you were a Catholic, you did not attend the act of corporate worship and that sort of isolated you in a way from the others who went there.” **(ID33)** He continues: “all the other children would be aware that you were a Catholic, that you were different from them in some way.” **(ID33)** He also recalls receiving: “a few hints from some of the teaching staff, which I don’t suppose would be tolerated today.” **(ID33)**

This experience is mirrored by that of ID16, whose father didn’t want her/him participating in the religious dimension of assembly, but her mother intervened. She notes: “You don’t want to feel different.” **(ID16)**

### ***Ethnicity of Pupils***

For those respondents who were educated within Roman Catholic schools, their geographical location ensured that there were considerable numbers of other children from Irish families. As ID88 recalls: “there were millions of people there who were Irish or Irish descent”. **(ID88)** Whilst ID107 reports that the: “majority of the children were Irish”. **(ID107)** Consequently, respondents report having “lots of friends who were like me”, which reflected the “community that we lived in”. **(ID90)**



For those who attended such schools the high number of Irish pupils was accepted as the norm. It was, as ID27 reports, when he moved to a non-Roman Catholic secondary school: "that it became interesting, because I was the only Irish person there". **(ID27)**

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Repeatedly, a connection is made between Roman Catholic schools and their catchment areas: "It was a microcosm, defined by the people who were in it and the people who were in it were all Irish, with Irish parents. It was a very Irish school." **(ID45)** This situation remained unchanged at secondary school:

*"Even there it was all kids from Irish backgrounds, all the way through school... the first year... I'd say in my class 90% of a class... of thirty kids would have been Irish, both parents, then for the rest of my life, we were in classes of thirty and there was only one kid and he had an Irish grandmother". **(ID45)***

The nature of this environment is stressed ID74's comments regarding 'internal rivalry' within his school, which reflected an individual's parent's points of origin within Ireland, Dublin, Belfast, Cork or Kerry. **(ID74)**

This is a crucial point for the experiences of a considerable section of the research population, who were largely immersed within an 'Irish World'. Many were socialised within families with at least one Irish parent, lived in communities with large Irish populations and attended Roman Catholic schools with children from similar family backgrounds. Consequently, many of their major influences during the primary period of socialisation will have been 'Irish'.

Those who attended Church of England and non-denominational schools observe that there "weren't many Irish kids at school". **(ID65, ID16, ID27, ID33, ID109,**

**ID110)** ID109 and ID110, who had both attended Church of England schools report that they were unaware of other children who had family links with Ireland: "not to my knowledge anyway". **(ID109)** For ID110: "It wasn't really an issue to be honest". **(ID110)**

ID65 perceives that, in light of his own negative experiences within a Church of England school, some people from 'Irish' families "might have kept that quiet".

**(ID65)** This is supported by ID27. Who states: "Eventually, after say two years, other people would say that they were Irish. Why didn't you say?" **(ID27)** If some individuals did play down their ethnic heritage in order to avoid conflict, this is extremely damning for those schools involved and for the mental health and sense of identity of those involved. As ID27 states: "Slowly, as it unfolded I became isolated because of beliefs which were passed to me." **(ID27)**

### ***Irish Culture in Schools***

Having established the relative numbers of pupils from 'Irish' families' attending schools in Birmingham, I set out to determine whether this utilisation is reflected in the curricular and extra-curricular content of these schools.

Only ID109 had formally studied an aspect relating to Ireland, completing a module on Irish History as part of a GCSE course. However, he records: "it must be a mark of the fact that I wasn't very interested, that I remember very little about it...which is a shame in some ways, I often wish I'd paid more attention". **(ID109)**

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Questions regarding Irish dimensions within the curriculum generally met blank looks and a series of "no, nothing" and "no, nevers". As ID01 states:

*"It was never mentioned, nothing encouraging you to do anything to do with your cultural background. It was totally ignored and everyone was treated in exactly the same way, but thinking about it now, I think that was a bad thing... you know, this person has a Polish cultural background or Irish cultural background or Italian or whatever should have been made more of, but it never was... which I think was wrong."* **(ID01)**

ID104 supports such sentiments, concluding that there was a "make you English type ethos at work." **(ID104)**

For the majority of respondents, the Irish dimension within schools was limited to occasional references, as ID65 recalls doing "a little bit on 'the Potato Famine'". **(ID65)** Similarly, there were few references to Black history, other than: "little bits about the slave trade" **(ID65)** This is supported by ID45, who recalls: "Maybe in history, we would have done things like 'the Potato Famine'... it was briefly touched upon, briefly, it wasn't a big issue at school." **(ID45)**

ID45 indicates that the inclusion of Irish cultural dimensions was largely dependent upon the actions of individual teachers: "In theology, we had an Irish-descent teacher from Leicester and she covered a lot of non-theological things, we would have certainly covered Northern Ireland in that". **(ID45)**

This apparently remains the situation. ID01 is a teacher within a school, in which "65% of pupils are deemed to be 'Irish'", in recognition of this fact she has written a musical which was based on Irish boy coming over to live in Birmingham and organised an Irish Festival:

*"I felt my culture had been ignored in school, we are probably doing the same here and when I sort of talked to the kids, loads of them were into Irish dancing... lads*

*playing hurley, Gaelic footballers... there seemed to be a huge thing... a sub-culture that we knew nothing about". (ID01).*

As part of the Irish Festival:

*"Every subject had to do something on Ireland... we had Irish cooking, geography, they do Italy as their country, they changed it to Ireland, well why can't you change it to Ireland all the time, these kids know about Ireland, they go back and forth... The kids loved it". (ID01)*

This compensated for a wider failure to integrate Irish cultural dimensions within other aspects of school life:

*"We do through music... dance, drama, but otherwise I don't think we do, we do in RE we talk, cultural backgrounds... Its just difficult getting people interested... even though a percentage of our staff are of various cultural backgrounds, mostly, Irish, but, even so because of national curriculum... its difficult to... think about the kids' cultural backgrounds". (ID01)*

The reality would appear that unless a particular teacher, as ID01 has done, inserts an Irish dimension into the curriculum, there is little alternative but for individuals to seek cultural inputs from elsewhere. It is also interesting to note that all but two of the interviewees had completed their formal education prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum, which is perceived to have limited the capacity of schools and teachers to shape the substance of learning. **(ID01)**

It is important to record that there is no distinction to be drawn between the cultural content of Roman Catholic schools, many of which had significant numbers of 'Irish' pupils and Church of England or non-denominational schools, which traditionally have had far fewer 'Irish' students. There is regardless of school ethos little or no emphasis placed upon aspects of Irish culture.

Subjects were also asked whether they would like to have studied aspects relating to Ireland and Irish culture. The responses range from complete apathy to overt interest. ID88 declares:

*"No not really... it's funny when I meet Irish people or people of Irish descent, they seem to be very into the Irish thing and will go to the Irish Centre and their children will go to church and the Irish dancing and all the rest of it, but we didn't have any of that". (ID88)*

This reflects ID88's wider exposure to aspects of Ireland and Irish culture:

*"Because our homelife wasn't focused on Ireland, at school I don't think we were particularly interested in the Irish culture, we were in England as far as Dad was concerned and he was just going to use the system to get a better address, get us to a good school, get our education and Ireland and the old country was not an issue."*  
**(ID88)**

ID108, speaks of the absence of both Irish history and Black history, but offers a different perspective:

*"Looking at it, you know, I don't expect English people to teach African history to me... I expect my dad to have taught me that, but he wasn't around long enough... The truth for that matter is this is England and we learnt about Anglo-Saxons... English history, which was right."* **(ID108)**

ID65 acknowledges that, whilst he now wishes he had studied aspects of Irish culture, he: "probably didn't think much about it then", however "as you grow up you... like to learn more about it, about the history." **(ID65)**

ID110, who attended a Church of England school, simply states that he would have liked "a little bit more". **(ID110)**

ID27's response to the perceived dearth: "You compensate don't you, the lack of it – creates more of an interest. You know, I have cousins in Ireland who don't have that much of an interest." **(ID27)** ID27 has, like other subjects, countered this absence by finding other sources of Irish culture.

ID74 offers an important conclusion regarding the content of the curriculum, suggesting that Irish culture "was always there anyway by virtue of where people were coming from." **(ID74)** This means that the individual is likely to associate with children from 'Irish' families, who will mutually reinforce each other's socialisation and normalise the Irish experience.

Having explored the role of different facets of formal education, it is important to acknowledge that formal settings are not the only arenas in which members of the research population are educated.

### ***Experiences of Informal Education***

One of the principle sources of informal education lies in access to Irish cultural activities. For some, Irish culture was accessed through Irish dancing classes, with individuals recalling experiences within dancing schools, we “weren’t very good, we had awful costumes”. **(ID72, also ID45, ID90, ID104, ID107)** For one male respondent there is a tacit acknowledgement of his own involvement: “even went Irish dancing once when I was five, found out you had to wear a skirt and that was the end of it”. **(ID45)**

ID107 had also participated in Irish dancing classes, recalling: “I actually quite enjoyed that, I was quite good at it as well for a while”. **(ID107)** She cites that it was her ‘English’ mother, who was responsible for her participation, she recognised that: “it was part of our culture, it was part of us and the fact was that she was quite proud of what we did, she used to love it”. **(ID107)** She suggests: “I think because she changed her religion, she gambled so much... I think she threw herself into it whole-hearted.” She concludes: “my Mom’s more Irish than she is English.” **(ID107)**

ID16’s experience of Irish dancing was more aspirational than actual, the aspiration emanating from her mother: “She would have liked one of us to do it.” **(ID16)**

For other subjects, access to Irish culture was dominated by music. **(ID27, ID65, ID72, ID108)** For ID27, this took place: “mainly within our family”, beginning an association, which extends to the present day: “I still do play, get up and sing at various Irish places, to entertain.” **(ID27)**

ID72 highlights her involvement in Irish bands with folk music clubs, arguing: “I think what I was trying to do there was reclaim where I’d come from, get back to some of my Irish connections”. **(ID72)** She clarifies:

*"I guess over the years it had been diluted, partly by myself, partly from where I lived, it was a very hard-nosed area Sheldon was. It had no sort of Irish culture... I was starting going to Irish folk clubs... just regain a little bit of what I thought I might have lost". (ID72)*

ID108 reports the perception of being surrounded by Irish culture, professing a "love" of "all Irish music", which stemmed from the fact that, in relation to Irish songs, she had grown up "with them". **(ID108)**

ID65's interest in music was a source of tension with his mother. The respondent had been given a number of records containing 'Rebel Songs', which provided a source of information in relation to Irish history: "I actually quite liked the songs, and even though they were telling of troubles, they seemed quite, you know, a jolly thing... I couldn't see anything that was really, really bad in them." **(ID65)** His mother felt somewhat differently: "She was aware I had the records, she didn't like me playing it loud... I suppose she might have thought that people might have been listening to the actual words". **(ID65)**

Only one subject has played Gaelic games, with his initial interest stemming from the decision of members of a local GAA club to establish a junior team. **(ID45)** Here we see the role of individuals within the community in establishing and supporting an arena in which Irish culture can be upheld.

ID74 recalls, not all cultural education was undertaken within community based settings:

*"On the weekend we would be taught Gaelic and we would have to sit and be taught by dad regularly and (he) frowned upon us speaking English at the weekend... lessons started at around 7 o'clock in the morning and they went right the way*



*through.”(ID74)*

ID74 perceives that he was immersed in Irish culture: “Our whole life as youngsters was growing up around an Irish culture.” **(ID74)** He recalls the importance of ‘stories’, involvement in different cultural forms and that the “bread was brought in on the boat”, a fact conveyed with almost religious devotion. **(ID74)**

Similarly, ID107 professes that Irish culture was rooted in their everyday experience: “you can’t actually specifically say anything, it was just a way of life to us”. **(ID107)**

ID90 stresses that such immersion did not strike them as children: “we didn’t feel any different at the time really, that was the sort of community we were brought up in.” **(ID90)**

Access to Irish culture, through dancing schools, music and gaelic games ensures that individuals have contact with an aspect of Irish culture, it also creates friendships and provides access to other Irish people of “all ages, oh you would get to meet old fellas who would play and have some good old yarns to tell.” **(ID27)**

Whilst some respondents spoke of their involvement in Irish activities during childhood, five respondents perceive themselves to have experienced a lack, or a complete denial of access. **(ID01, ID65, ID88, ID109, ID110)** For ID01, this is explained by her parents’ experiences as migrants:

*“I know my mother knew... she just didn’t have the time, because they were trying to eke out a living to tell us about that sort of stuff. I’d like to have done Irish dancing... we didn’t have the opportunity to do that... it was more important to get on with everyday living, rather than worry about your cultural background.”(ID01)*

It is interesting to note that all of those who report experiencing a dearth of access to Irish culture lived outside the confines of what would be recognised as traditional Irish communities. For example, ID88 grew up in Solihull, an area with a relatively small Irish presence, surrounded by few other Irish people, with parents who did not seek to involve their children in Irish activities. Her father did not talk about "his life in Ireland", whilst her mother offered a negative view of other Irish people:

*"These people, gobshites... that go to the Irish Centre and go out for their drink on a Friday night, are not the people she would have been socialising with when she was in Northern Ireland... That's not the kind of thing that nice, decent folk did." (ID88)*

Consequently, she had little contact with other Irish people in Birmingham and, due to strained familial relationships, little contact with Ireland.

Similarly, ID65 grew up in the Chelmsley Wood area of Birmingham, which had a significant number of Irish residents, however this concentration did not match those of areas such as Sparkhill, Sparkbrook or Erdington. He perceives there to have been few Irish cultural activities within the local area. Consequently, he had a greater degree of contact with wider local Birmingham culture, attending a local youth club. This is also likely to have been affected by the fact that this subject spent much of his childhood with his father who was from the Caribbean.

ID109 and ID110 also report that they had not participated in any 'Irish' cultural activities, either during childhood or subsequently, ID109 states:

*"If you're talking about Irish sports or anything like that, I don't even know what other Irish things I could have done, but, no I don't think so. Even when we visited*

*Ireland, I wouldn't have particularly have done, I didn't go out and play the hurling and stuff like that". (ID109)*

ID109 and ID110's access to aspects of 'Irish' culture has been shaped by the experiences of growing up in families with parental links to Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. Instead, both participate in non-Irish activities. **(ID109, ID110)**<sup>ii</sup> Neither subject reports any secular, cultural activity, which they relate to their Northern Irish, Protestant, cultural heritage.

The perception of an initial lack of access solicits a range of responses. For ID33, it has created an interest in adulthood, I "felt as though I was missing out". Consequently, he started to learn the Irish language, later taking on a teaching role. **(ID33)** She underlines the personal significance of the Irish language, stating: "Not to be able to know your own language is a loss". **(ID33)**

ID88 also perceives that she has set out during adulthood to find out more about Ireland and to answer important questions about the Anglo-Irish relationship, via history books, visits to Ireland and talking to Irish emigrants:

*"I've always wanted to know about the history of Ireland and when you asked your parents, because they had eight children, they never had time to sit down and tell you, which is understandable really and they also had their own view and their own slant on things and I just wanted to have it from a different perspective really... and to try and understand why the Irish were treated so badly, why the English don't like the Irish and what the problems have been". (ID88)*

### ***Awareness of Irish History and events in Northern Ireland***

Awareness of events in Irish history and Northern Ireland varied considerably amongst interviewees, from those who found it 'all a bit confusing to be honest' **(ID110)** to those such as ID16 who states: "I think I've always been aware. 'I've always watched it quite closely" **(ID16)** , and ID45 who concludes: "I'm very aware of events in Northern Ireland, read a lot on it, very, very aware of it... I would think in the top 1% awareness level in British society". **(ID45)** ID45 recalls being aware of such events during childhood:

*"You wouldn't have been formally educated as to the history of Ireland and England and the various conflicts, but you start becoming aware of it, because obviously it was big news, I mean the 70s and 80s, you know you're going through the 'hunger-strike' era, and it's the news every day. You knew that you had an Irish identity, you know, various elements within your community felt very strongly about that. Around Sparkhill when I was a kid, Sinn Féin used to get more votes than the Tories".*  
**(ID45)**

He recalls Sinn Féin rallies in Sparkbrook:

*"We knew exactly what the issues were, the mad Republican element within the Irish community, the mad skinhead element who just wanted a punch-up on the 'Paddies'... and we knew who the guys were in the car, the secret service or MI6 or whatever, it was funny." **(ID45)***

ID72 perceives that she has been shaped by particular events in Northern Ireland:

*"Bloody Sunday' had a big impact for me. It was just awful, that was much later on. I think politics, you know, what was happening in the North and feeling without any real grounding or fully understanding the situation: 'Why don't they just get out And leave them alone to sort it out?'" (ID72)*

The absence of accounts relating to Irish history and Northern Ireland within the educational curriculum ensured that individuals had to seek information from a range of sources.

The media represents one source of information, although some respondents perceive an inherent bias in the media's coverage of Northern Ireland: "They had their own slant on the situation". ~~ID73~~ ( This is echoed by ID107: "people who only know what they read in the newspapers have a very warped view of it." **(ID107)**

ID109 outlines a number of issues relating to Northern Ireland, including a detailed account of his mother's interpretation of 'Gerrymandering'. **(ID109)** He perceives that this has left him better informed": "I used to worry about it a little bit, but when I've spoke to my relatives in Ireland, they said, yeah, it sounds a lot worse on the news, the things that happen, don't really happen that often. That put me at ease a little bit". **(ID109)**

A number of respondents cite that they have received information regarding the situation in Northern Ireland, from other people. **(ID110, ID16, ID107, ID108, ID72, ID74, ID109)** ID107 refers to her father talking about Irish history, which had left her/him able to reel off events in Irish history, almost at will. **(ID107)** Similarly, she refers to obtaining information from "rebel songs" and "Irish Martyr books and history", concluding: "He likes us to know our history". **(ID107)**

ID74 stresses that his father has been instrumental in the development of his awareness: "Dad always made us aware of the issues because he kept quoting Cromwell." **(ID74)**

ID109 suggests that his opinions have been shaped by his mother who used to view Catholics as "lazy", but now views them as being "artistic, creative, rather than hardworking, technical like the Protestants". **(ID109)** ID109 is one of a number of subjects who perceives that he has been shielded from the conflict in Northern Ireland:

*"My parents didn't really talk about it. In fact I was talking to my mum about it, earlier today and she was saying she deliberately didn't talk about it, because she thought it, I don't know, might damage us in some way, put us off talking to Catholics or something like that". **(ID109)***

ID110, who perceives that he has "never sat down and had in-depth conversations" with his parents about Northern Ireland records that his awareness had come: "just from being over there and talking to people". **(ID110)** He perceives that: "A lot of my family were angry really, as to why they were doing it and not very understanding why." When asked who they were? He states: "'They' - the IRA or whoever, the Unionists or whoever were bombing... angry at the mindless violence." **(ID110)** The issue of confusion is dealt with in the next section.

In addition to gauging the levels of knowledge regarding Northern Ireland, I also explore the respondent's attitudes to these events.

A group of respondents state that they are essentially bemused or uninterested by events in Northern Ireland. As ID110 records: "It's quite confusing actually, I think

at the end of the day it is all greed or something, I don't really understand it very well." **(ID110)** His conclusion: "I wouldn't like to say. I'll sit on the fence."  
**(ID110)**

Of his own lack of knowledge, ID109 cites: "I've never taken enough interest in it to form what I consider to be a decent opinion on it". **(ID109)** He asserts that 'the Troubles' leave many people in Britain confused: "a lot of people consider them to be a bit almost ridiculous, a lot of trouble over nothing". ID109 continues: "it's hard to understand how something like that can be such a problem and I think I feel that as well... I don't know all about the history to be able to make that judgement".  
**(ID109)**

Only three of the interview subjects express, to differing degrees, support for the Republican movement in Northern Ireland. **(ID72, ID104, ID107)** ID107 reflects that: "I'm very staunch about it, I do believe that Ireland should be united, I don't believe in like the fighting and everything, but I do believe it should be one country, because it was ours in the beginning... but the English took it off us, now we want it back". **(ID107)**

She continues:

*"I've had this row before with loads of people, do you believe in the IRA? No! But I do actually believe in what they are fighting for. I don't believe in the method, I don't agree with them. But I do believe what they are fighting for is right. It should be a united Ireland, this country should have nothing to do with it, let them get on with it". **(ID107)***

Similarly, ID104 records that she has been active within Northern Ireland related politics, through the 'Troops Out Movement', visits to the West Belfast Festival and attendance at a Sinn Fein Ard Fheis. She concludes: "If people came up my road shooting me, I'd probably shoot them." **(ID104)**

Other subjects speak of feeling uncomfortable about the events in Northern Ireland and the consequences for them as individuals. ID65 outlines an incident in an Irish pub in Birmingham, where there was a "Collecting tin in there, for the IRA, that sort of made me stand back... I didn't expect to see it." **(ID65)** He concludes:

*"It wouldn't have been something personally that I'd have put money to myself... obviously in the early days they had a struggle... I think my personal stance is, once innocent people started getting hurt and bombed, I think they lost support then and it was around them times they were bombing parts of England, and blowing up all their own people". **(ID65)***

When questioned what he meant by "their own people"? He states that they are "killing their own people in Ireland, whether they're Catholics or Protestants, you know, they're still killing their own people". **(ID65)**

ID45 identifies that he has: "had people make comments... ignorant, ill-informed comments about the IRA and linking that in some way to the Republic of Ireland... what I can only describe as misunderstood perceptions". **(ID45)** Such responses indicate the importance of increasing the levels of information relating to Northern Ireland within wider British and Irish societies.



### ***Views of their Parents***

In discussing the views of their parents, subjects were at pains to stress that their parents did not support the violence in Northern Ireland. For example, ID16 states: "Mum wouldn't indoctrinate us in any way, she wouldn't. She wouldn't be biased... She is not an IRA sympathiser, most definitely not". **(ID16)** She concludes: "she didn't agree with the violence there at all, in any shape or form, but she understood why... Because she could see both sides of the coin". **(ID16)**

Similarly, ID45 prefaced accounts of his parents' views with: "I'm not from a mad Republican family". **(ID45)**

Despite stresses upon the impartiality of the views of parents and other sources of information, five subjects who state that they have become aware of the situation in Northern Ireland through personal reading and information from other people, offer confused accounts of this situation or accounts which contain stereotypical conceptualisations. **(ID65, ID88, ID108, ID109, ID110)** In addition to ID110's aforementioned reference to Unionists and bombings, ID108 refers to Protestants: "wanting to murder the Catholics", then hesitates and adds "or was it the other way round?" **(ID108)**

Such confusion stresses an inherent problem of individuals relying upon other people for information, for this information is always subject to the interpretation and bias of the teller.

### ***Employment***

Interview subjects were drawn from a range of occupations, including financial managers, social workers, care assistants, teachers, administrators, nursery nurses, students, unemployed and retired people.

Two respondents were directly engaged in employment activities which include Irish aspects, one as a teacher who, as previously detailed, has undertaken Irish-specific work and the second within a local authority department, drafting procedures relating to the treatment of Irish children. **(ID01, ID74)**

Other subjects speak of the way in which their identity has impacted upon their careers. ID72 states of her work with children in care: "Even in my work, if I come across an Irish family and I have done, I have to be careful you know, that I don't give them different treatment... its very strong in me, very deep." **(ID72)**

Another subject speaks at length of experiences within the construction industry, remembering fondly that a "large amount of the workers were Irish". **(ID65)**

During this period the subject had explored his own identity and experiences: "Asking them when they came to England... what happened to them". He concludes: "they had some of the same sorts of negatives as Black people did, like signs on doors, no blacks, no Irish... That did surprise me when I first heard that, Irish people being white and not actually being travellers, why were they getting turned away by people at doors." **(ID65)**

### ***Role of Religion in Childhood***

A considerable number of respondents, including those from both Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions, perceive religion to have played a considerable role in their experiences as children. **(ID01, ID16, ID33, ID45, ID72, ID74, ID88, ID90, ID104, ID107, ID109, ID110)** Inevitably, much of this relates to the importance attached to religion in the lives of their parent(s). I explore the experiences of those who are drawn from the different religious faiths in turn.

For those who grew up within the Roman Catholic Church, religion is perceived to be central to many aspects of their lives. As ID01 concludes: "the church was the

mainstay of life really.” **(ID01)** She reports: “Mum and Dad met going to church... she was coming out of Benediction and he was going into Polish mass and he waited for her”. **(ID01)** This then set the pattern for the remainder of their lives: “they chose the house we lived in because it was near the church.” **(ID01)**

There are repeated references to the ‘Central role of religion’ and the notion of religion as ritual. **(ID16, ID01, ID72, ID74, ID88, ID90)** As ID16 states: “I didn’t recognise it as important, it was just part of the week, you went to mass and you didn’t question it, I didn’t have deep thoughts about the meaning of God or anything like that.” **(ID72)**

ID88 confirms in relation to her parents’ lives:

*“That was the main focus of their lives, you know, it was important that they were good Catholics... it was very important that it was still instilled in us. There was no question that you went to mass on a Sunday and no question that we said the rosary every evening... it was impressed upon us very, very strongly how important it was... it wasn’t to be questioned. It was what we believed.”* **(ID88)**

Similarly ID74 states: “Church was a must on Sunday and we all trooped off two by two to seven o’clock mass.” **(ID74)**

ID16 states that because she attended a non-Catholic school, her parents insisted that she receive religious instruction in the home: “they thought I was missing out on Catholicism at the secondary school.” **(ID16)**

For many respondents, Catholicism was the ‘accepted norm’, an important part of growing up: “I suppose I just took it as normal... it was something I did”. **(ID16)**

Members of the Protestant faiths place a similar emphasis on the role of religion in their lives. Both ID109 and ID110 report that they had attended church ‘quite a lot’

during childhood. **(ID109)** ID109 concludes that the stimulus for this was provided by his mother: "she was the one who made us go to church". **(ID109)**

A number of respondents make references to aspects of their parent(s)' religious faith. ID109 confirms: "It's always been important to my mother". **(ID109)** She had been a member of a Presbyterian church in Northern Ireland, before attending a United Reformed Church in Birmingham, she has "always been a very religious person, far more than I think I or my dad". **(ID109)** He concludes: "she had a strong belief, she'd speak openly about it". **(ID109)** Conversely, ID109 records of his father: "it wasn't really important to him, or he never showed much enthusiasm about going to church". **(ID109)**

In some cases, the comments of individuals revealed as much about their own attitudes as those of their parents:

*"The religion was not important to me at all. It was something that we had to do, it had no relevance at all. My dad was very, very religious. I emphasise the word 'religious'. We religiously went to church every Sunday, even growing up in our teens, we all went to church. As we got older, we went to a different service, but he would still question us about what the sermon was about and what colour vestments the priest wore. It was very rigid in that sense". **(ID74)***

ID74 makes a clear connection between religion and the notion of community, stating: "I also think there was a bit about the family standing up in the community."

**(ID74)**

Similarly, ID45 identifies that community participation places its own expectations upon the family, they were a:

*"Practising Catholic family, as much of that was out of community expectation and habit, which I think are two factors that are very important in why a lot of the Catholic people of my parents age always attended church.... So I don't think they were particularly religious by any stretch of the imagination, but my dad was a man of simple faith, a man of habit, you do go to mass because you should."* **(ID45)**

To this end, ID74 proudly reveals that his family had its "own pew in church". **(ID74)** He also refers to saying the Rosary in the house, photographs in the 'Catholic Pictorial', experiences as an altar boy and his brother's decision to go into the priesthood, which is described as: "the ultimate one could get in an Irish family." **(ID74)**

Participation in religious activities also provided a social arena in which to meet other 'Irish' people, as: "the majority' of people at the local church were Irish." **(ID27)**

ID72 refers to going to mass as a "social occasion": "I enjoyed going to mass in Ireland, no problem, it was an occasion, special, after mass everybody stood outside church having a chat". **(ID72)**

ID01 states of her parents' devotion: "Both parents had come from Catholic backgrounds and it was something when they came to Britain to hold on to." **(ID01)**

Other subjects pick up on specific aspects of their parents' behaviour. In reference to her mother's 'guilt', she records: "I don't have that." **(ID01)** ID01 also reveals her feelings about her mother's devotion: "Oh, too religious". **(ID01)**

ID72 is more damning of her parent(s)' religious faith. She remarks that: "after a while I used to get a little irritated by my mother's piousness". **(ID72)** Another muttered: "Couldn't bear it". **(ID16)**

ID109 outlines his father's reaction to his decision to attend a local Church of England church, rather than the local United Reformed Church: "You'll burn in hell for this". **(ID109)** He rationalises:

*"He'd always been brought up as Presbyterian and he hated the idea of me going to a Church of England (sic), but now that I've gone there and after I'd been there for a while, you know he loved i , he liked me singing in the choir, he enjoys choral music, so he was fine about it after a while". **(ID109)***

ID74 reports a similar response from his father when he converted to the Church of England from Roman Catholicism. **(ID74)**

### ***Non-attendance, Pretence and Stopping***

Amongst the most enlightening accounts relating to religion are those which dealt with the issue of non-attendance and, where applicable, the decision to cease attending.

The rationale for non-attendance varied considerably. For ID72, apathy played a key role, recording that she: "couldn't be arsed". **(ID72)** She continues; "I can't even say it was a deep intellectual... 'I reject God' you know... It wasn't a well thought out thing, there were other things happening". **(ID72)** However, it was not until later, that she ceased 'believing':

*"I felt that Catholicism itself was based on a kind of fear and a contract you make, if you be good you might go to heaven, I stopped believing there was a heaven and a hell. I actually believed in that for quite some time, you know, longer than most people had the sense to realise that it was propaganda". **(ID72)***

There are also several accounts of subterfuge, of those who would: "pretend to go to mass and nip out the side door with the mass sheet, to show your mom when you got home." **(ID45)**

For ID88 and ID45, the decision to cease attending church prompted clashes with their parents:

*"In later years...we used have lots of debates and fights about not going to mass and she still now, is so disappointed that we haven't followed the Catholic religion and she feels that she has failed in her duty as a mother, not to have eight practising Catholics as children". **(ID88)***

ID88 interceded on behalf of younger siblings, returning from university, telling her mother: "If you make them go to mass on Sunday, they will not come and visit you".

**(ID88)**

ID45 reports:

*"It was a little matter of conflict when I was about nineteen and I used to come home occasionally from college at weekends and I wouldn't go to mass... the one and only time in my life there was any real conflict and it was with my dad, he was adamant that I should attend church and told me he thought he'd failed as a father when I said no...'I didn't believe in God'. He was pretty distraught over that. I guess because he'd never come across it before and he, in some way, felt responsible." **(ID45)***

For ID90, the influence of her parents is much longer-reaching, continuing to attend church well into adulthood and only ceasing once she had left home: "You could

never think of not going to mass when we were living at home.”(ID90) This reticence continues: “You wouldn’t tell them that you didn’t go every week.” (ID90) ID01 also speaks of shielding her parents from her periodic non-attendance: “I still wouldn’t, I would never, even up till the day my mother died, and I don’t do it to my father now, if they say go to church, I go, even at forty-three.”

### ***A Renewed Interest in Religion***

A number of subjects report a revived interest in religion in adulthood, however this takes different forms. ID88 reflects that she has returned to the philosophy of Christianity:

*"For a long time I just thought what a lot of old baloney! I think I believe in the structure of, not necessarily Catholicism, but... the standards of Christianity, basic rules like to love thy neighbour... do unto others... sounds to me like a fairly pleasant social standard to have. So I 'kinda' believe in those things.... I don't go to church on Sundays, I'm not a practising Catholic or anything. I suppose I just pick out the bits I find useful." (ID88)*

This notion of taking on religion on one’s own terms is also suggested by ID01, who speaks of “being able to pick from that religion”. (ID01)

Such reinterpretation is shared by ID16, who states: “If I do go now as an adult, its because I want to go”. (ID16) She concludes: “Catholicism can be quite guilt-ridden, not for everybody, but it can be, I don’t want to go that way.” (ID16)

ID27 also emphasises the spiritual side of religion: “when you get older, you get a bit of an insight and you start to hear about different damaging things, things about priests in abuse of different people. You get to realise that it is not about relating to



a priest, it is about relating to God.” **(ID27)**

ID74 also reports a return to organised religion, but not within the Roman Catholic faith: “I am a rebel – I go to the C of E Church now”. **(ID74)**

ID45 offers a wider perspective on the role of religion in the Irish community:

*“I think Christenings are more of a habit from our tradition, in my view... many young people who are from Irish descent who are, in my view, non-practising Catholics, or even don’t believe in God practising Catholics, will have a Christening. Its as much as a traditional party as anything. I think some of them have lost sight of what it is that they are signing up to”. **(ID45)***

This echoes Gans’ theory of ‘symbolic ethnicity’, whereby the ceremony continues, long after the initial meaning has been lost or disregarded.<sup>iii</sup> ID45 goes on to make reference to people from “our generation” who attend “for one reason only – to get them (their children) into the schools”. **(ID45)** The reputation of Roman Catholic schools for results and discipline means that there remains a demand for places even amongst those who no longer believe in the doctrine of the Church.

### ***Effect of Religion***

Respondents were also asked what effect they think religion has had upon them. The majority, even amongst those who have rejected religion, responded positively. Responses include “generally, I think it was good” **(ID90)** and “I can honestly say I’m glad I was born into a Catholic family.” **(ID16)**

Inherent in these accounts is the recognition of the values associated with Christianity. ID16, echoing ID88’s earlier comments refers to the experience of growing up within a ‘Christian family’: “Mum and dad share basic humanism, in this

case Catholicism, sharing and don't do to others... A good grounding... a conscience, as long as it's not too much of one." **(ID16)**

ID110 refers to the role of religion in his life, stating: "I think that's why I've turned out so well". **(ID110)** He explains that it is, "the way you tow your values and everything, I think it's just from a religious background, you've just got better values and more sort of conscious". **(ID110)**

ID27 once again reiterates: "it has been quite a good thing, because it's about community." **(ID27)**

ID108 places a particular emphasis on her religious faith within her life. Having grown up as a Roman Catholic, in adulthood she has been baptised into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, describing herself as a 'Rasta' and a 'Jesus Dredd'. **(ID108)**

ID110 is equally keen to stress that he maintains his religious faith, but, when asked whether religion is important to her/him. He explains:

*"I think maybe 'cause I sing in the choir, its more monotonous and you concentrate more on the singing, than I think on the actual religion. I still consider myself religious, but not as much as I used to... maybe that's because I'm a scientist and a bit more cynical". **(ID110)***

ID88 reports that religion has had a detrimental effect upon her family, when after her father's death, her brother fled: "that was about the religion thing, forcing, forcing, forcing". **(ID88)**

The most critical comments regarding religion are offered by ID109, who records that he is "thoroughly disenchanted with a lot of what I've seen in Christian churches". **(ID109)** He particularly criticises the Church of England's expectation

that individuals simply accept whatever the church states, through some sort of 'blind faith': "I've since realised the error of my ways." **(ID109)**

The final area of social influence relates to community involvement.

### ***Involvement in Community Activities***

Two respondents state that they have undertaken periods of work within Irish community organisations in the city, a cultural organisation and the St Patrick's Day Parade. **(ID33, ID27)** Of this commitment, ID33 reveals: "I like to think that I am making some contribution to the Irish community in Birmingham, in some way, directly or indirectly." **(ID33)**

ID27 has intermittently been involved in the St Patrick's Day Parade since its reprise in 1996. He describes this initial event: "the whole day was quite special... it's quite important that you don't make a show and let the city, the whole Birmingham Irish crew down." **(ID27)** He identifies that there was considerable apprehension prior to the first parade: "I tell you what went through my head, 'God, I could get shot here!' I don't know why that was going through my head – 'Oh my god, I am really vulnerable'. 'I could get a hiding from National Front types'." **(ID27)** The reality was that: "there was no trouble at all, so it was unfounded." These fears emanated: "from (a) the Pub Bombings and (b) how British people, Birmingham people reacted to the Pub Bombings." But thanks to the success of the Parade: "that's totally gone." **(ID27)**

As I outline in Chapter Seven, the St Patrick's Day Parade has become *the* central event in the calendar of the Irish community in Birmingham, allowing for a positive, public display of Irish identity. It has also improved the community's portrayal within the local media:

*"The thing with something like the parade is it throws up a positive image. Obviously, the press will always have a powerful tool to turn around and talk about the Pub Bombings and the 70's, but that's something that can be done away with by showing a positive image. Showing that we are not a terrorist organisation of people."* **(ID27)**

This has the added effect of normalising the Irish presence and displays of Irish culture within local society, making Irish culture available to the wider community. **(ID65)**

Consequently, the Parade reaches a greater number of people who were born in Birmingham with family links in Ireland, including those who have previously not accessed aspects of Irish culture, increasing such exposure and promoting a positive sense of Irish identity amongst this grouping:

*"There must have been what sixty thousand people, the Irish having their own party, I mean no disrespect to the English - what happens on St George's Day? Nothing! Because we... hold it close to us, we... believe in what we are and we don't want anyone to forget what we are and where we come from and it matters to us. And I think that's the difference and that's what I try and instil it in my kids. You can't forget who you are. Because, if you don't know who you are, then you haven't got nothing."* **(ID107)**

She goes on to state that the Parade embodies a sense of community:

*"It didn't matter if nobody knew ya, you could just stand there, chat away... but something like that, if they were all English, they'd all stand in their own little groups*

*and they'd only talk to their own children, their own friends... but on the Parade, it didn't matter if you didn't know anybody". (ID107)*

She concludes: "it's a big thing isn't it – the whole community sort of comes together". (ID107)

Having explored a range of societal structures and phenomena, I now examine the significance of location and locality.

### ***(9.v) Geographical Influences upon Identity***

When mapping the experiences of a migrant grouping, of whatever generation, questions of geography and location must represent central considerations. This section plots the research population in relation to the point of departure, destination and process of migration: to Ireland, Birmingham and Britain.

#### ***Area of Residence - Birmingham***

All but one of the interview subjects had been born and spent the majority of their childhood in Birmingham.<sup>iv</sup> Six of the interviewees perceive themselves to have grown up in areas of the city such as Sparkhill, Sparkbrook, Erdington, and Balsall Heath, which have large Irish communities. (ID27, ID45, ID74, ID104, ID107, ID108) Of the nine remaining respondents, eight perceive themselves to have lived in predominantly 'English' areas, the other grew up in Wales. (ID01, ID16, ID33, ID65, ID72, ID74, ID88, ID109, ID110) The substance of this section is determined by the subjects' perceptions of an area, rather than actual local demography.

Respondents who identify themselves as having lived in 'Irish areas' offer a picture of well-developed Irish communities, with a myriad of ethnic symbols of the area's

ethnic credentials. This is exemplified by ID45, who categorises Sparkhill as “a sort of Irish ghetto”:

*"You were in this area and everyone around you was Irish... my road was about one hundred and twenty houses, five English houses, two or three West Indians... two or three Indians or whatever, the rest were exclusively Irish on the road, it was quite remarkable. All of them were big families, kids would have been intermingling at school and known each other". (ID45)*

ID45 underlines the significance of this Irish presence, stating that his parents do not wish to leave Sparkhill, despite the fact that they own a house on the outskirts of the city: “you’re talking about links, community links or whatever and that’s the primary reason they won’t leave”. **(ID45)** This reluctance occurs against ID45’s concerns that it is: “not the area it used to be, when I was a kid, which was all Irish, lot of Asians, higher crime rate, its pretty rough now, but they’ve got their little circle, my dad’s near the bookie, near his favourite pub, you know those sorts of things.” **(ID45)**

Similarly, ID107 describes Kingstanding as “a very close-knit Irish community”, characterised by a communal spirit: “because we’re Irish”. **(ID107)** She concludes: “everybody around me is the same as me”. **(ID107)**

The local Irish presence is further stressed by ID01, whose mother remarked, as she walked up Erdington High St: “It’s like walking in Wexford”. **(ID01)**

One of the clear messages from those subjects who grew up in ‘Irish areas’ is a sense of security. As ID74 states of Sparkbrook, it was the “community that they felt comfortable in”. **(ID74)** ID74’s family subsequently moved to Ladywood, where

they were one of the first Irish families to settle, an experience which he describes as a "culture shock". **(ID74)** ID74 recalls the local population being a "very English community", which he felt was "insular". **(ID74)** This insularity translated into confrontations: "I could guarantee three or four fights before I got to school, because of the Irish heritage." **(ID74)** He also acknowledges that: "What we suffered as children, my parents suffered as elders within that community: 'Irish bastards', door regularly being kicked." **(ID74)** Their everyday reality had implications for their identity: "We either conform with that, or hang on to our heritage and my dad was absolutely determined he would hang onto his heritage". **(ID74)** He identifies that amidst his fathers' "Vulnerability of being here, there was a desperation to hold onto his roots and not to submit to the English way of thinking." **(ID74)**<sup>v</sup>

For the majority, the experience of growing up in an 'Irish' area was a positive one: "I know that there is a community of Irish people in Birmingham, where as if the Irish community was not as strong as it is, I would probably be more out of sorts. I would probably abandon (my) Irish connections." **(ID27)** Asked whether other people have done so, he responds: "they are not allowed to have had a history and so they just become comfortable fitting in with what's around." **(ID27)** He continues: "Saddens me, to think that people have lost an important part of their evolution". **(ID27)**

Having explored the individuals' experiences of growing up in local areas of Birmingham, it is important to take a step back in the migration chain, to explore their experiences and perceptions of Ireland.

### ***Visits to Ireland (Childhood)***

The survey and interview phases demonstrate that a considerable proportion of the research subjects had visited Ireland during the course of their childhood. **(ID01, ID16, ID27, ID45, ID72, ID74, ID90, ID104, ID107, ID109, ID110)** For many, these visits were a regular part of their family's calendar, prompting comments such as: "had to go to Ireland" **(ID74)** and "high point of every year". **(ID72)**

For most interviewees, visits to Ireland were invariably to areas of rural Ireland, spending time with grandparents, visiting relatives, 'working' on the family farm. **(ID45, ID90, ID72, ID27, ID74)** Of the latter, ID74 recalls with relish: "It wasn't a holiday". **(ID74)**

Accounts of these visits to Ireland are littered with positivity. Terms such as "great adventure" **(ID01)**, "good experiences" **(ID90)**, "lot of fun" **(ID45)** and the notion of relatives who "welcomed me in". **(ID16)**

ID107 spoke at length of childhood trips: "Over every year, Christmases and everything". As children they would: "count the days off before we'd get there and then we'd get there, the time would just go so fast... It was a great time to be a child in Ireland". **(ID107)**

This positivity is shared by ID01, as she reels off enjoyable aspects of these visits, rushing from one to the next: "blackberrying, water, stories of the Banshee, smell of peat". **(ID01)**

When individuals were asked why they thought they enjoyed visiting Ireland as children, two subjects offer interesting responses, these reflect the individual's situation in Birmingham and relationship with Ireland. ID27's interest stems from the perception of not feeling at 'home' in Birmingham: "I don't feel comfortable



here". **(ID27)** Whilst ID74 reports a keenness to: "see where my dad's roots were, where mom's roots were, marry the two up living in England." **(ID74)**

Whilst for many respondents visits were an experience shared by the whole of the family, for ID16: "dad wouldn't go over", it was always "mum and myself". **(ID16)**

Her father, who was 'English': "didn't see a relevance in going over". **(ID16)** ID16 herself expresses a desire to have visited Ireland more regularly, as her friends had done: "I would have loved that, go over in the summer and stay over there." **(ID16)**

When asked why she cites a "sense of belonging". **(ID16)**

For ID88, family divisions ensured that there were no family trips, such visits were only undertaken by her mother. She initially suggests financial reasons as an explanation, however she later states: "No there was no family holidays to Ireland. I think whatever happened to bring my mom and dad to England, dad couldn't let it rest and he had no interest in going back to Ireland". **(ID88)** This absence is reflective of ID88's wider experiences in Birmingham, in which she perceives herself to have had little contact with Ireland, Irish culture and Irish people. This appears to affect her self-perception, as I subsequently develop ID88 has not disclosed her ethnic heritage within her employment setting.

Only two other subjects state that they did not visit 'Ireland' during childhood. ID108 recalls that her mother did not want to go back, because: "Belfast was bombing, war... you never heard the why, for what reason? No-one taught us that".

**(ID108)** Meanwhile ID65 records: "I haven't been there yet." But states that he wishes to do so, "to see if its what it's like the way they tell me... if it's slower and laid back and it's as green as they say it is."**(ID65)**

ID110 records that he visited Northern Ireland: "at least once a year", but discloses that he found visiting relatives "boring". **(ID109)** Similarly, ID45 speaks of "occasional holidays" of "endless hours" spent visiting relatives, a process which left

her/him "bored rigid". **(ID45)** This however represents only one facet of his experiences, which were "So different from my urban existence in Birmingham".

**(ID45)** Whilst expressing "mixed emotions about the experience", he concludes that the positive "would probably more than cancel out my negative memories of just sitting in pubs endlessly drinking coke and crisps". **(ID45)**

ID45 places particular significance upon levels of contact with Ireland, stating that his sister's sense of Irish identity is stronger than his own, because of her greater degree of contact, facilitated by more frequent visits. **(ID45)** This is supported by ID72, who regards the four years she spent living in Leitrim: "as the happiest part of my childhood." **(ID72)** ID72 identifies this as a principal influence upon her identity: "I still love Ireland, it is a romantic view now I suppose, but I remember being very happy then." **(ID72)**<sup>vi</sup>

ID107's contact with Ireland during childhood is such that she states that she grew up:

*"Over here and over in Ireland, because we used to go 'home' every year, without fail, we used to go for about a month and then, like I say, Christmas time, we'd go over 'home' and then once a year my dad would take one of us 'home' with him. So both sides". **(ID107)***

The fieldwork phases demonstrates that holidays in Ireland played a significant role within the lives of a great number of research subjects. The sheer number of individuals making annual visits to Ireland, not only stresses the degree of mobility between Birmingham and Ireland, but also their level of contact with 'Ireland'. The impact of the visits is multi-layered, providing access to Ireland, their parents'

experiences, extended family members and a potential reinforcement of their experiences of Irish culture in Birmingham.

### ***Visits to Ireland (Now)***

All but one of the subjects record that they have visited Ireland during adulthood. They offer a series of rationale for these visits. For the majority, it is to visit relatives and friends, but for some, it is simply because:

*"When I go to Ireland, I just feel so at home there. I remember going into a restaurant and they had boiled bacon, potatoes, cabbage with a glass of milk on the menu and I thought this is what we used have when we were children and it's just absolutely gorgeous. And that's why I like Ireland, I feel really comfortable."* **(ID88)**

ID88 did not visit Ireland during childhood, has not participated in any Irish cultural activities and most interestingly the part of Ireland that she visits is not that left behind by either of her parents. This underlines the notion of 'home' as a state of mind, rather than a specific place.<sup>vii</sup> She states:

*"It's odd, because it's Southern Ireland that I've been to, obviously I've never tried to go to Northern Ireland because of 'the Troubles' but I've never been to see my mother's side or my father's side... because I don't feel that I fit in with either side."* **(ID88)**

It is also interesting to note her perception of Northern Ireland as a no-go area.

Similarly, ID108 expresses a preference for "Dublin", with its "free kind of feeling", rather than Belfast, where her mother is from: "I've always been in Ireland and my

link with it is wonderful, but it's down south, not up North". **(ID108)** Her visits occurred in adulthood and have afforded an opportunity to lay the memory of her grandfather to rest: "I've done that bit, so I feel good, granddad's settled, in that respect, I had to see where he comes from, I had to visit." **(ID108)**

ID45 continues to visit Ireland, but feels that he wants to take his family to Ireland for a holiday, but: "somewhere, totally removed from both sets of relatives". Because when you "visit one; visit them all". **(ID45)**

A number of subjects suggested that Ireland has changed. For ID45 these changes have been positive, stating that Dublin has become a "trendy, happening place", amidst the processes of urbanisation. **(ID45)**

For ID01, the nature of family connections in Ireland have changed in the transition to adulthood: "now, things are very different", concluding that her relatives are all well-off with big houses and their own businesses. **(ID01)**

For other subjects such changes are profoundly negative, speaking of lost links with their extended family and the changing nature of life in Ireland. **(ID107, ID72)**

ID107 paints a picture of summers spent in Mullingar, yet concludes that upon her last visit: "It had changed and I was disappointed... 'cause I think I still want to hold onto my childhood over there, keep my memories special. It's all changed... everybody's' gone... it's not the same anymore". **(ID107)** She recalls, when: "I first saw the McDonalds, I was horrified... I didn't want it to be like that. I wanted it to stay the same." She concludes: "It's not the same place anymore". **(ID107)**

### ***Have you ever thought of living in Ireland?***

Having ascertained the respondents' perceptions of their experiences in 'Ireland', I posed the question: Have you ever thought about living in 'Ireland'?

Seven respondents express an interest, or a more firmly cited desire to live in Ireland. **(ID01, ID27, ID33, ID72, ID74, ID104, ID107)** For one respondent, this thought occurred: "Often, almost daily". **(ID33)**

For others, the notion of living in Ireland is fuelled by the conception that: "It's my spiritual home". **(ID27)** This desire is underpinned by the sense of not being settled in Birmingham and not viewing the city as 'home'. He envisages wanting to "retire" to Ireland: "finish out my days, I can't think of a nicer place."**(ID27)**

For ID107 'return' is a consideration for the future:

*"A few years ago... I did actually consider going to live in Ireland, packing up, but, like I say, my children were born here and it would be unfair to uproot them... and when my children are grown up, you know, I probably will go... 'cause I've always said that when I'm older I will go back and live there."***(ID107)**

For ID01, this interest is rooted in the appeal of Ireland: "It's the place, it's the people... affinity I suppose... When I go there I feel as though I am going 'home', although I would never call it 'home'. I'm comfortable there I suppose." **(ID01)**

Such responses suggest the fulfilment of a 'Myth of return', of completing the journey of the migrant. Here it is being handed down to the next generation. As with the previous generation, this 'return' is not assured, as ID33 states: "Whether I will ever realise it is another matter". **(ID33)**

For a number of subjects the notion of living in Ireland is an appealing one, but their actions are subject to their partner's attitudes. As ID01 states: "I'd like to buy some land and live in Ireland, my partner doesn't, it doesn't hold much attraction for him at all. But yes I would." **(ID01)** Similarly, ID74 states: "I would, my partner wouldn't". **(ID74)**

ID90 reports that she has previously thought of living in Ireland: "I would have liked to when I was younger. I always said I want to live in Ireland, even when I grew up, in my early twenties and that." **(ID90)** The appeal of Ireland has since receded and is now perceived to have been heavily tied into the notion of "being on holiday".

### **(ID90)**

For others, living in Ireland is not something that they have seriously considered. ID88 acknowledges that this is appealing, but not realistic: "Yes, it sounds nice as an ideal, but no, I wouldn't go and live there and don't think I would like it after a while. Because its all game-playing, indirect questions, oblique, err underhand... that wouldn't suit me." **(ID88)**

ID65 simply states: "I think things are bit too laid back." **(ID65)**<sup>viii</sup>

### **'Home'**

I initially determined to test whether the notion of Ireland as 'Home' was, or had been in common usage amongst the research population and to use this as a precursor to a further discussion about where the subjects perceive to be 'home'. However, four subjects used the term casually, prior to the subject being raised by the interviewer. **(ID01, ID16, ID74, ID107)** Where this occurred I used this as a lead-in to the wider discussion.

When asked about her casual use of the term, ID16 states: "You know, I didn't know I said that... You repeat things sometimes and you don't know you are saying it."

### **(ID16)**

ID107 repeatedly used the term throughout the interview: "we used to go home there every year" and "If I was 'home' in Ireland". **(ID107)** When asked about this, she records: "It's my 'home', I live here, but that's my 'home'. So like they say 'home is where the heart is'... That's my 'home' and it always will be. I don't/didn't

even think about that when I said that. I'm going 'home'. It's just that's the way it is". **(ID107)** The fact that four respondents used the term, without prompting and when questioned acknowledged its use by their parents, suggests that it was in common use amongst sections of the research population. A further six acknowledge that they or members of their families adopt the term. **(ID27, ID33, ID45, ID72, ID88, ID90)** As ID01 acknowledges: "'Home' would always refer to Ireland" and "Yeah, always, it was always going 'home'". **(ID01)** ID45 confirms, it was a "frequent topic of discussion". **(ID45)**

ID88 draws a distinction between her parents' use of the term, which reflects their relationship to Ireland:

*"I don't think Dad used it because... he didn't refer to his life there much, but Mom would refer to 'I'm going 'home' to Ireland' and when they their adult friends when we were children they all would talk about going 'home' to Ireland, so it is just a term I've got used to."* **(ID88)**

Whilst some respondents are comfortable with their parent's use of the term: "Oh Yes, it is their home". **(ID88)** Others question its continued use, ID90 states of her mother: "she still refers to 'home' as Ireland and I still think she's got an Irish accent and I find that hard to believe that she has lived here since she was sixteen." **(ID90)** She continues: "I don't think they sort of mean 'home'... its just the term they use for where they were brought up and where their parents lived". **(ID90)**

ID45 offers a further insight:

*"It can be one of two things, it can be an emotional word, which can intimate to you that they have more of an emotional attachment to it or it could be a habit, you*

*know if you've heard it often enough and if the terminology was in common use in your house growing up as a kid, it can be something you use out of habit". (ID45)*

### ***Personal Use***

Seven subjects continue to use 'home' to refer to Ireland. **(ID01, ID16, ID27, ID33, ID72, ID74, ID107)** ID27 proudly confirms: "By the age of four I was referring to Ireland as 'home'." **(ID27)**

ID74 states: "When I am talking to people I will say have you been 'home' this year? That is a very Irish thing." **(ID74)** He continues: "I am here for this moment, my home is Birmingham, my physical home is in Birmingham, but no my 'home' is... (signalling a reference to 'Ireland')". **(ID74)** He concludes: "Ireland is 'home', that's where my parents were born, bred and came as visitors to this country, so by default I am born here." **(ID74)** ID74 is one of four subjects who indicate that they do not belong in Birmingham. **(ID27, ID74, ID33, ID107)**

ID33 offers an account of his own use of the term: "I doubt I would as I was younger, it was only as I got older that I more sort of turned to Ireland and things Irish that I would have done." **(ID33)** He concludes: "Certainly, I would think of Ireland as 'home' now." **(ID33)**

ID107 is particularly determined in her use of 'home', when asked is Birmingham 'home'. She states:

*"I live here, but it's not my 'home', it never, ever will be... it's not my children's home either. Even though, they were born here, I would never want them to think it was their 'home'. Because 'home' is where the roots are, 'home' is where you belong, 'home' is where your family is... my childhood memories of my family was over there and that's my 'home', it's my 'home', this isn't." (ID107)*



She concludes: "we live here and I live here out of necessity, 'cause, like I say, my children are here and my dad's here and my sisters and everything, it's necessity for me and when I am older... yeah, I probably will go back and live there."**(ID107)**

Six of the respondents are equally clear that they do not consider Ireland to be 'home'. **(ID01, ID45, ID88, ID90, ID109, ID110)** As ID88 states: "No, I couldn't because it's not home, I don't feel comfortable... with my Mom's side of the family or my Dad's side, so it's not a term I would use, but I have to say when I go to Ireland I do feel exceedingly comfortable there". **(ID88)** She explains: "I am conscious that it is a different culture and it's one that I perhaps don't understand as well as I would like to believe." **(ID88)**

ID01 acknowledges that, whilst her brother who had been born in 'Ireland' and considers Ireland to be 'home', it did not hold the same degree of commitment for herself: "It just isn't 'home, Ireland is not 'home'. It was where my mother came from, where we would go". **(ID01)** There is a suggestion here that they are a generation removed from Ireland.

Another subject offers a more obvious answer: "No, because home to me was obviously the house we lived in". **(ID45)** He continues: "Never have referred to Ireland as 'home' – but... if I was in a discussion with someone, even of the 'second generation', who used the term in a context I would be able to understand." **(ID45)**

ID110 recalls that: "Yeah, Mom always talked about 'home' as Northern Ireland, going 'home'... 'It's where she grew up, just as I consider this 'home'." **(ID110)**

For those who do not view 'Ireland' as 'home, the next obvious question is, 'where is 'home'? For some, the answer is obvious: 'Birmingham, where I live'. **(ID109)**

Similarly, ID110 records: "If somebody asked me where I'm from, I'd say Birmingham". **(ID110)**

Another subject contents herself with a more localised debate. 'Home' is: "Here, in England. Solihull, not Birmingham". She explains:

*'When I left home, I moved out, just outside of Solihull and then I moved to Moseley and I was happy enough. But whenever it was suggested to buy a house and settle, I couldn't bear to live anywhere but within the remit of Solihull, so this definitely feels like 'home'. (ID88)*

For others, their position is not so obvious. For example, ID65 appears torn, offering a series of responses: "The Caribbean and Ireland, I see as 'home... and Birmingham, I know it's in England sort of thing, Birmingham I see as my 'home'." **(ID65)**

For ID108, 'home' is neither: 'Ireland', the Caribbean nor Birmingham, but rather: "home's sweet Africa, Ethiopia". **(ID108)** Religious beliefs mean that this is the only available conclusion: "Home is where the heart is and my heart's there, 'cause I just believe everyone... if everyone knows where they're coming from, they're destined to Africa". **(ID108)** Interestingly, she later refers to Birmingham, stating: "I always love to come home". **(ID108)**

For five subjects, their sense of 'home' has changed over time. **(ID01, ID33, ID45, ID72, ID90)** ID72 states:

*"I can actually remember a particular moment in time... when I decided, because I said earlier that I never really felt rooted, but I do now, I think its not... an absolutely solid rootedness, but it's a pragmatic rootedness. This is where I live, this is where I've been, where I've had my ups and downs, its where my son was born, my son's*

*got a lot to do with it... I've no inkling, aspirations at all to move anywhere else".*

**(ID72)**

ID01, who had grown up in Wales states: "When I first came to Birmingham, I would refer to Wales as going 'home', but I don't use that term any more, I say now, I'm going to Wales". **(ID01)** She cites of this changing relationship: "I think 'home' is... where my family are, where my husband and my son are, that will be 'home' wherever it was. But yeah now Birmingham is." **(ID01)**

This is echoed by ID90: "If you asked me that before I got my family I probably wouldn't have said that. I might have said Ireland. But when you've got your own family it sort of does make a difference". **(ID90)** She concludes: 'home' is "where they are". **(ID90)**

Having explored considerations of geographical location, I examine the subjects' experiences within each of these settings in relation to abuse and discrimination.

### ***(9.vi) Abuse and Discrimination***

Before exploring the experiences of those who report abuse and discrimination, it is important to record that four respondents report no such incidents resulting from their ethnic heritage. **(ID45, ID90, ID109, ID110)**

### ***Different Forms***

The other eleven respondents report that they have experienced different forms of abuse or discrimination in a range of settings and from different sources. **(ID01, ID16, ID27, ID33, ID65, ID72, ID74, ID88, ID104, ID107, ID108)**

Reports of incidents of verbal abuse range from childhood references to having "lived with pigs" to reactions to events in Northern Ireland: "if there was a bombing, I can

recall people coming up and taunting me.” **(ID27)** ID27 recalls that this took the form of “Irish names – Irish idiot. Just the usual bully crap you get alongside something like that”. **(ID27)**

ID65 recalls the previously referred to conversation regarding international football when he was called a ‘stupid Mick’. **(ID65)** He explains: “It’s a derogatory remark, innit, about Irish people, calling me stupid - ‘stupid Mick’.” **(ID65)** ID65, as a ‘Mixed Race Irish’ person offers a wider insight into his experiences of abuse: “I have actually had verbal discrimination from ‘Black’ and ‘White’ people, because of being ‘Mixed Race’.” **(ID65)**

This is supported by ID108 who recalls being told: she was a “half breed, you’re not Black, you’re not white”. **(ID108)** She concludes: “I am Black and the reason why I am so adamant I am Black is because when mom was pushing the buggy, she was told ‘you Black bastard lover, with your Black fucking kids’.” **(ID108)**

Experiences of abuse are not limited to verbal taunts, four subjects also recall incidents of physical attacks upon themselves or members of their families. **(ID01, ID27, ID74, ID65)**

ID01 recalls on the way to school there would be an: “awful lot of fights, because of going to a Catholic secondary school and that was a lot to do with being Irish, fights would start because someone would call me a daft name”. **(ID01)** She concludes: “they saw Catholic as synonymous with being Irish”. **(ID01)** She also acknowledges that her siblings: “would get picked on a little bit more than I did.”**(ID01)**

ID27 recounts an incident in which an individual walked into an Irish pub and “threw something at a Pope mug that was hanging up and was verbally aggressive with Irish people”. **(ID27)**

Most disturbingly ID74 recalls: “a completely unprovoked attack on my mom, he (the assailant) came down slapped my mom across the face and called her an ‘Irish

Bastard', that she had no reason to be here." **(ID74)** ID74 also recalls how his "Mom lost a baby, because this young lad... rammed a pram into her stomach when she was pregnant... completely unprovoked and the baby was still-born." **(ID74)** ID74 rationalises that these incidents within an 'English' area, as reflecting local "unease with accepting different cultures into their community." **(ID74)** ID74 also records taking up boxing for "survival". **(ID74)**

### ***Different Settings***

Interviewees also identify that incidents occurred in a number of settings, including school **(ID01, ID27, ID33, ID72, ID74, ID107)**, employment **(ID27, ID65, ID88)**, public houses **(ID01, ID27, ID65)** and in the street. **(ID65, ID74)**

ID01 and ID74's recollection of "fights" on the way to school are part of a bigger picture of abuse in educational settings. ID107 recalls having the "mickey taken out of me" for participating in Irish dancing classes. **(ID107)** She concludes: 'If it's said jokingly, it doesn't bother me, but if somebody's being abusive to me... say something personal about me, (rather) than about just digging the fact that I'm Irish". **(ID107)**

ID72 speaks of having a "strong Irish accent" at school, which she perceives led to a teacher wrapping her over knuckles, because of her pronunciation. This left her/him: "nervous about how I spoke". **(ID72)** ID72 is one of three subjects who suggests that such abuse was not restricted to fellow pupils. **(ID72, ID16, ID33)**

ID27 concludes that his experience of education is: "Not one I would expect my children to go through." **(ID27)**

In relation to abuse in employment settings, ID27 recounts a speech by a senior member of staff in which he referred to the subject and a 'Birmingham-Irish' colleague as 'British': "I had to stop him in the middle of his speech and correct him."

**(ID27)** ID27 concludes that his reaction is dependent upon the setting: "in the workplace I will pull it, socially I will ignore it, get out of that environment into another one where it does not." **(ID27)**

As previously intimated, perhaps most distressingly, ID88 reports that the perceived attitudes of colleagues has led her/him to conceal her ethnicity within the work place:

*"I know how English people feel about Irish people... and I know that certain English people there... despite the Equal Opportunities Policy, are very racist. And so I have never told them that I am of Irish descent, nor would I want them to know about it and I would feel very uncomfortable if they did know because I know what their reaction would be. So I see that as quite a negative thing, because I feel quite bad about not being open (as to) who I am."* **(ID88)**

She rationalises:

*"I've heard people saying things about (the) Irish, and how the Irish are thick, dirty Irish and they don't like the Irish, (pause) and how wonderful the English are. I've known that that exists and as a result of knowing that exists, I've just kept quiet about my ethnic origins... you just hear people saying these things and because I'm white I can get away with it, but I certainly know what discrimination feels like, or racism feels like."* **(ID88)**

Subjects also recount the experiences of other people, including family members, including physical attacks; some of these have already been outlined. **(ID01, ID16, ID72, ID74, ID107)** ID01 cites that her brother was "so badly beaten up that he

spent three weeks in hospital and could never have children... simply because he spoke with an Irish accent." **(ID01)**<sup>x</sup>

Four respondents cite examples of anti-Irish sentiments being expressed by neighbours. **(ID01, ID74, ID16, ID72)** These invariably involved references to commonly held stereotypes: "the backward Irish and all the rest of it". **(ID74)**

ID01 recalls of her neighbours' attitude towards her mother: "they used to say things like how she was queen of the gypsies... she put up with an awful lot of stick from neighbours, simply because of being Irish." **(ID01)** ID01 is categorical that the roots of the hostility toward her mother was anti-Irish prejudice: "our next door neighbours were very anti because our mother was Irish, not because my father was Polish, that was OK, it was because my mother was Irish." **(ID01)**

Two subjects articulate their mothers' experiences in almost identical terms, stating that their mothers felt that neighbours didn't like her "because I'm Irish" **(ID72)** and "She's got this thing about people not accepting her because she is Irish". **(ID16)**

Such sentiments led individual parents to avoid influencing the attitudes of their neighbours, ID74 remarks that as children they "were marked out by their hygiene" **(ID74)**, whilst ID72 reports that they had to be "proper, appropriate and polite". **(ID72)**

Recalling a previously outlined incident, in which his mother lost a baby, ID74 states: "From a very early age, you knew the hostility you were around." **(ID74)** He acknowledges the mutual desire of parents and children to protect each other:

*"I don't think as children we knew the full extent of the racism that was being given to mom and dad. I mean, they obviously protected us from a lot of it. But equally, they didn't know the amount of grief that we would have on the way to school. I mean we never told them about, oh gosh, we hid nearly 95% of it."* **(ID74)**

For ID107's father, the most persistent source of abuse was her maternal grandmother; he "wasn't allowed in my nan's house". **(ID107)** She recalls of the Birmingham bombings: "My God, you'd think it was my dad that had done it". **(ID107)** She concludes, that she "made life extremely difficult for him":

*"She would be quite rude... to his face... constantly going on about sending the Irish back, there were nothing but dirty scum, all they're fit for is digging the roads, which actually quite hurt my dad, because that's what he actually did for a long time...she was saying he was never going to be good enough for her daughter... it wasn't anything personal, it was because he was Irish". **(ID107)***

ID104 states that her mother recalled her English paternal grandfather would "give her six pence and tell her to go back where she came from." **(ID104)**

ID16 concludes: "I'm very much on the side of the minority... because mom's told me what's happened to her being Irish... I feel it's given me a bit of a grounding, I don't know what it is like to have a black face, to be picked on because of your accent, you know, I think it has given me a little insight." **(ID16)**

### ***Different Sources***

Whilst the source of much of the abuse outlined thus far emanates from within local society, there are two further arenas in which subjects report abuse. These are in Ireland and from within the Irish community in Birmingham. **(ID01, ID27, ID33, ID72)**

Incidents in Ireland principally relate to individuals questioning their identity, being told that they are not 'Irish', that they are 'English'. Once again these include verbal and physical incidents.



Some incidents are perceived to reflect anti-English sentiments within Irish society, one subject encountered an individual, who thought her partner was English, however, when the individual realised that she was Welsh, his reaction changed: "If he'd said yes to English, there obviously wasn't going to be anymore conversation."

**(ID01)**

ID27 recalls an incident in which "One lad", who appeared to be filled with a "lot of hatred", questioned his identity: "He got knives out and all kinds of bizarre stuff".

**(ID27)** For ID27, this is merely: "Same as you would over here, you come across a small minority who are pig ignorant to the fact that you might be Irish, even though you have an English accent, so you would get a similar sort of bully over there as you would over here." **(ID27)**

Here we have individuals who detail incidents of abuse in Birmingham in a range of settings, also having their identity questioned in the very environments in which they expect it to be reaffirmed. Such accounts suggest an assumption that these individuals are 'English'. As ID33 states: "it was the situation of Irish people regarding you as English and English people regarding you as Irish". **(ID33)**

Some respondents felt that their position in Ireland was legitimised by their local connections. ID45 recalls: "No negative experiences", citing that he was with friends from Derry. **(ID45)** Similarly, ID74 states that: "Whilst in Ireland you are accepted, we are family."**(ID74)** However he offers a cautionary: "Now that's not been tested by going to different parts of Ireland". **(ID74)**

Two respondents also detail incidents of verbal abuse or questioning by other 'Irish people' in Birmingham. **(ID27, ID33)** ID33 recalls selling tickets for Irish community events in Birmingham and being faced by 'Born in Ireland' individuals who stated: "you are not Irish". He identifies a twin track approach to dealing with such comments: "sometimes I might argue it out with somebody, in other cases, I

might decide that I would be wasting my breath." It "depends how much you value the opinion of whoever's giving it." **(ID33)** He concludes: "It wouldn't be so much what they said as their demeanour". **(ID33)**

ID107 perceives her experience of abuse to be affected by where she lives:

*"I do stay most the time in an Irish community... most of my friends are Irish, the majority of places I go are Irish, I send my kids to predominantly Irish, Catholic schools, so, I don't know if it would be different if I expanded out into the wider world". **(ID107)***

There is also a suggestion some incidents have been normalised. This involves incidents being passed off nonchalantly or as normal experiences, amidst the "rosy haze of childhood". **(ID01)** For example, ID27 describes one incident as the "usual type of stuff", adding "My mother always put it down to 'character-building'." **(ID27)** Another incident in Ireland is dismissed as "Stuff you might cope with over here." **(ID27)** He concludes that these incidents: "give you an anthropological view of life on both sides of the equation, so where you didn't fit in, in Britain, would be exactly the same reason you wouldn't fit in, in Ireland". **(ID27)**

ID45 reports no negative experiences, yet outlines an incident of a job interview which he assumed to be a formality, but which he perceives was scuppered by one of the interviewers, whom he describes as an 'Ulster Protestant':

*"It was very clear from the off that he was very clearly not happy about someone with the name of XXXXX (family name)... He asked me, specifically the name of my school I went to, which was very clear to me that as it was a saint something, he was asking for a reason". **(ID45)***

Having failed to get the job, ID45 describes the incident as “disturbing to some degree.” **(ID45)**

Other subjects, who similarly dismiss the notion of experiencing abuse, also recount incidents which are remarkably similar to those identified by other respondents as abusive. **(ID90, ID110)** ID110 states that when in Northern Ireland they always got thick Brummie jokes, however, this is dismissed as “banter really, rather than anything highly abusive”. **(ID110)** His response was to respond that the Irish were “stupid”. **(ID110)**

### ***'Plastic Paddy'***

I set out with the assumption that 'Plastic Paddy' was a commonly used derogatory remark against members of the subject population. However, only three respondents were aware of and understood the meaning of the term. **(ID27, ID33, ID65)** Of these, two had been called one, the other state : “I don't think I've ever been called one... not to my face anyway, I don't know if they've ever said it behind my back.” **(ID65)** Offering a definition, he records: “Someone who pretends to be Irish, obviously, they might have an Irish parent, like I have, and doesn't actually speak Irish, or seem to be Irish, but sort of claims to be Irish.” **(ID65)** His reaction: “Its wrong innit, 'cause, you either are or you ain't... I can claim to be Irish, because I've got Irish blood in me, if I didn't have Irish blood in me, then I think someone can call me 'Plastic Paddy'.” **(ID65)** This is echoed by ID33, who “would only have contempt for the use of it”. **(ID33)**

These three subjects are the most frequent users of Irish community venues and have significant degrees of contact with other members of the local Irish community. This may suggest that the real issue in relation to the term 'Plastic Paddy' lies within the Irish community itself.

A considerable amount of the reported anti-Irish sentiments occurs in the wake of the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings'.

### ***'Birmingham Pub Bombings'***

All but two of the subjects report have some recollection of the events surrounding the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings' and for two subjects, the trauma is magnified by the acknowledgement that they regularly used the Public Houses which were bombed and the realisation that "I could have been there!" **(ID16)** ID74 recalls that his sister always went to 'those two pubs', but on the night of the explosions she "didn't fancy it". **(ID74)** His perceived proximity left this subject professing: "Anger about what had gone off". **(ID74)** This created a conflict between his attachment to Birmingham and Ireland:

*"We vented our feelings... I did go out, walking the streets in anger, with disbelief of what had gone off. I think I was in shock, complete and utter shock. And more then when the names started rolling of the dead and the injured, and its fascinating... a lot of those young people involved in that bombing had Irish surnames. You know, we were blowing up our own people. Not saying that we should blow anybody else up, but we were literally blowing our own people up".*

**(ID74)**

He concludes the "Disgust, dismay... took a long time to get out of my system."**(ID74)**

ID72 speaks of being "very conscious within the college that next day of actually being careful about being Irish". **(ID72)** She continues:

*"I didn't say a great deal about it, you know. I wanted to talk about it, but I was conscious that there was, I think there was marches going on in the city and things like that about the Irish. So although I was 'second generation', I felt conscious... a bit afraid I think."* **(ID72)**

ID16 recalls the reaction of other 'Irish people': "I can remember going to work and the girl I worked with... she was an Irish girl and she was crying". **(ID16)** This reaction is a common one amongst the respondents: "I felt bad... especially when they've done it in Birmingham, because, knowing how large the Irish community was in Birmingham". **(ID65)**

Similarly, ID108 records: "I remember me feeling really bad, knowing that they was from Northern Ireland". She explains: "'cause we was from Northern Ireland, that's us ain't it, the whole of my family is Northern Ireland". **(ID108)**

The reactions and responses to the bombings vary greatly. For ID74: "It was talked about, I don't think there has ever been an event talked about so much." **(ID74)**

By contrast ID72 recalls: "it's noticeable to me now that we didn't actually talk out loud about it, any views we had were probably reinforced silently". **(ID72)**

For ID107: "It was a horrible time", in which "It was a crime to be Irish". **(ID107)**

She continues: "it didn't matter whether you were Southern Irish, whether you were Irish descent... any connection... you didn't say anything about it. And that went on for quite a while, that went on for a hell of a long time." **(ID107)** ID107 concludes: "People didn't understand, we were just as hurt by it as they were, because it was important to us, that we have peace, we want peace and that was the last thing we wanted to happen." **(ID107)**

ID65 recalls the reactions of school-friends, who:

*"Never made comments about Irish people until that day. You know, you'd have the jokes about Irish people, but some of the real nasty... comments about what they would like to do to Irish people, stick bombs back up them, see how they feel like it, 'If I'd got my hands on one of them I'd kill 'em'."* **(ID65)**

ID65 identifies this as a barometer of reactions of wider society: "things kids would say at school, obviously, the only place they got it from was their parents, it was obviously what people were actually saying." **(ID65)** The common response: "send them all back to their our country, let them all blow themselves up over there."

**(ID65)** This notion is particularly troubling for ID65: "Being Mixed-Race, where do I go, send all the Irish back to Ireland, send all the Blacks back to where they came from, then chop yourself in half". **(ID65)** Similarly, ID107 records: "send us all back? Where they gonna send us all back? I was born here". **(ID107)**

ID104 records that the 'Bombings' meant that it was "hard to be politically involved then", she reports fearing she would: "go on a march and be fitted up". **(ID104)**

Other subjects are reliant upon accounts offered by their parents and the wider community. As ID45 cites: "I don't remember any incidents at the time, but I remember a few stories which I'd heard, maybe when I was a bit older, about guys being beaten up at Longbridge... I don't know if that's true". **(ID45)** ID45 also recounts a story of his father's meeting with a contracts manager, who simply "turned his back on him, just physically stood on his heels, turned round and refused to shake hands with him". **(ID45)**

ID16 and ID107's experiences were heightened by the fact that they attended the same primary schools as the children of the men who were arrested, convicted and subsequently cleared of the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings'. ID107 records: "when it all started to come out, I was more shocked, these were my friends' fathers". **(ID107)**

She recalls the daughters: "got it really bad, they were tormented". **(ID107)** She concludes: "It wasn't so much the kids, it was the parents, the parents drummed it into the kids... them poor girls they used to get beat up, shunned and stolen from and even the teachers were horrible to them". **(ID107)**

A number of subjects report that the 'bombings' left them scared for others: "I feared more for my dad than any of us... dad had a lovely brogue", he was "out there working in the community". **(ID74)**

ID27 recalls his parents "not being served at the local butchers", and "strife on their faces". **(ID27)** ID88 states: "I think maybe Dad was getting a lot of stick at work and comments being made". **(ID88)** She recalls the anti-Irish backlash being: "very blatant and open about how disgusting they thought it was and how anti-Irish it made them". **(ID88)**

Four subjects **(ID16, ID27, ID45, ID88)** perceive that they were shielded from the fall-out by their parents, as ID27 records, they: "have guided me away from actually remembering or seeing any part of that." **(ID27)** This is echoed by ID88: "I think perhaps I don't remember much about it. I know that my parents would have been quite protective of us". **(ID88)** Similarly, ID16 stresses: "Whether she actually had somebody say to her something nasty, I don't know. I don't think she would tell me that". **(ID16)**

ID45 also acknowledges an awareness of anti-Irish sentiments within society:

*"I was eight years of age... I know at the time there was hostility towards the Irish community at that time, for example... the St Paddies' day march was stopped at that time, so yeah, I was aware all the way through that there was certain elements within British society that were anti-Irish". **(ID45)***

It is important to note that it is of little consequence whether the individuals concerned actually recall these events or that these memories have been shaped by the recollections of others. It is sufficient that the subjects retain these perceptions as a form of folklore.

A number of subjects acknowledge that the Birmingham Pub Bombings have had a particular effect upon them as individuals, their families and wider Irish community. As ID74 recalls the Irish community having "come so far, to go so far back". **(ID74)** The bombings undid much of the work of the Irish community in integrating into local society: "it didn't do anybody any favours at all". **(ID16)** It created a situation whereby: "perhaps you'd be frightened to say you had any Irish connections". **(ID16)** This is most dramatically stressed by ID74, who cites that the bombings led her/him to play down his Irishness: "That's when I claimed anonymity by being English. I could blend in. I didn't have an Irish accent and that carried for some time." **(ID74)**

ID27 goes against the flow of feelings expressed by other subjects by stating that the events of 1974 brought the "Birmingham-Irish so together", concluding it "probably made us stronger as a group of people." **(ID27)**

I then sought to gauge the attitudes of subjects toward 'Irish Jokes' and stereotypes of the Irish within British society.

### ***Irish Jokes***

Attitudes towards the phenomena of Irish jokes are deeply polarised between those who view them as a vehicle of humour that should not be taken too seriously and those who see them as deeply offensive.

ID90 rationalises: "I don't think that you can be too sensitive, otherwise you would have to watch what you are saying all the time." **(ID90)** Consequently, if she heard



one being told, she would “probably laugh”. **(ID90)**

This reaction is shared by ID110 who concludes: “I thought they were quite abusive, but I think they’re all just jokes at the end of the day, can’t really take them seriously.” **(ID110)**

ID45 is more vocal in his defence: “I find them almost positive, I remain to be convinced that ethnic jokes are in any way, erm, violently negative, I don’t subscribe to that theory at all”. **(ID45)**

ID109 begins by stating: “I suppose they are like any sort of racist joke, I laugh at them and then think oh well... I shouldn’t be laughing at this.” **(ID109)** He continues:

*“My dad tells them and I sort of feel like, if he tells them, they’re ok, which isn’t really true... I always feel if the person who’s the butt of the joke is actually telling the joke, then they’re not bothered so why should I be. But of course, he’s only one example of that, other people may find it offensive.”***(ID109)**

ID109 concludes that he simply does not make a connection between the subjects and himself: “they tend to be about people like Paddy and Mick and they’re Southern Irish names, they’re Catholic names... So I suppose, maybe I don’t consider myself to be part of that, I’m Northern Irish, my parents are Northern Irish.” **(ID109)**

Other respondents hold equally firmly based views which are stridently against ‘Irish jokes’. ID107 states:

*“I think they’re very pathetic actually. What’s the old saying: ‘Why are Irish jokes so stupid? So you English can understand them.’ I don’t find them amusing at all... I*

*think they're very derogatory... 'cause it enforces views of us, as thick, beer-swilling, potato-digging, road diggers and it just doesn't help". (ID107)*

The notion of giving life to stereotypical images is underscored by ID65: "It's taking the 'mickey' out of someone because you think they're a lesser person than yourself". **(ID65)** It is interesting to note that the term 'to take the Mickey', is criticised in some quarters because of its anti-Irish connotations.

A number of respondents cite that if they hear an 'Irish joke' being told they will "challenge them" **(ID74)**, ID65 instructs the teller: "Don't tell Irish jokes in front of me" **(ID65)**, whilst ID107 reports: "I'll just make it plain, it doesn't amuse me". **(ID107)**

ID27, who labels the 'jokes' "pig-ignorant", states that his response would depend upon the setting. If it took place in a social setting, he would "Shut my gob, blink and wait for an opportunity to leave." **(ID27)** Whilst if the same incident occurs in the workplace he "wouldn't accept it". **(ID27)**

ID16, who states that such 'jokes' are "derogatory", records that: "I wouldn't wade in with both feet, but wouldn't laugh at it", rather she "would respond with examples of Irish success." **(ID16)**

For ID01 the significance of the 'jokes' is dependent upon the source:

*"It'd depend where it was being told and who was telling it really... If my brother who is Irish tells an Irish joke its hilarious... when you hear someone like Bernard Manning telling an Irish joke then you feel, yeah, no that's wrong. Its ok to laugh at yourself, but not other people to laugh at you". (ID01)*

This is contradicted by ID33, who has "no stomach for them at all, especially when

they come out of the mouths of Irish people.” **(ID33)** He concludes: “If you challenge somebody who is denigrating Irish people with so-called ‘Irish jokes’, the ground is cut up from under your feet by the knowledge that some of the worst offenders are our own people.” **(ID33)**

ID01, who is a teacher in a Roman Catholic secondary school cites: “I hate it when it’s said in the staff room at school, because, you know, we’re going out there then and teaching Irish kids”. **(ID01)** Her policy is to challenge not only the ‘joke’, but also the wider professional approach: “I might say, don’t worry about it, but most of your class out there will be Irish, just remember that when you’re going to teach them.” **(ID01)** She concludes: “I think a lot more hurtful things are said... about Irish people.” **(ID01)<sup>x</sup>**

Many ‘Irish jokes’ are underpinned by negative stereotypes of Irish people and it is to these that I now turn.

### ***Stereotypes***

All of the respondents were aware of stereotypes of Irish people within British society and were able to outline examples of such stereotypes. A similar array of attitudes are expressed as had previously been outlined in relation to ‘Irish Jokes’. The majority of subjects recall negative conceptions of the Irish, which cast them as thick, violent, drinkers. ID01 speaks of finding such stereotypes “very hurtful... because they are talking about my family, if you like and therefore me.” **(ID01)** This attitude is validated by the acknowledgement that she disapproves of stereotyping of any grouping. **(ID01)**

ID33 and ID65 conclude that stereotyping reflects the “ignorance” of the perpetrator, whilst for ID27, it signifies the “judgmental side of society”. **(ID33, ID65, ID27)**

ID72, who states that "they make me cross", questions the substance of the stereotypes: "I don't know how true that is actually, I don't think they drink any more than the Scots or the English for that matter." **(ID72)**

ID27 argues that stereotyping of the Irish leads health-care professionals to "make judgements about Irish people... if an Irish person has been drinking they immediately class him as an alcoholic". **(ID27)**

ID65 highlights that the political situation in Northern Ireland serves to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Irish people within British society: "most people think every Irish person walks around with a grenade in his pocket... and not every Irish person does walk around with a grenade in his pocket and not every Irish person actually supports what the IRA do." **(ID65)**

Three subjects assert that they associate the Irish with positive stereotypes: "Everybody always says the Irish are very friendly and I think the tourist industry exemplifies that." **(ID109)** Interestingly, ID109 makes an association between anti-Irish stereotypes and the 'Southern Irish', stating: "I would associate these with Southern Ireland... nobody talks about Northern Ireland at all, it doesn't seem to come into the equation." **(ID109)**

These sentiments are echoed by ID110: "Southern Irish people are always said to be very friendly, but then there's also the type who say Irish people are quite stupid, but I don't think so". **(ID110)** He concludes: "All stereotypes are bit uninformed... I mean, the Irish people I've met are very friendly, none of them I've met are stupid, no more than anyone else I've met." **(ID110)**

Both ID109 and ID110 have links into Protestant communities in Northern Ireland, it would be interesting to ascertain whether such views are reflective of this grouping.

Two respondents, the same individuals who did not object to 'Irish jokes', are equally unfazed by anti-Irish stereotypes, concluding, that it "doesn't really affect me, to be honest." **(ID90)**

Once again ID45 is more vehement in his criticism, arguing that the global view of the Irish has changed dramatically in recent years:

*"I think the stereotype 'Irishman' has changed over the last twenty years, very dramatically. If you were to ask 17, 18 year olds on the streets round here now, to describe Ireland and Irish people and you'd asked the same teenagers in 1974, you'd have such a different response, I'm not sure it would be recognisable that we are talking about the same country, so stereotypes are a changing, it's a fluid thing".*

**(ID45)**

### **References**

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<sup>i</sup> One or both parents Irish or grandparents

<sup>ii</sup> ID109 and ID110 did not identify any cultural forms which were perceived to reflect their origins within the various Protestant communities in Northern Ireland.

<sup>iii</sup> Gans, H. J. 1979, pp.6-18

<sup>iv</sup> ID01 had been born in Wales and had spent almost twenty years of her life in Birmingham, having initially moved to the city to attend a local college.

<sup>v</sup> ID74's experiences in Sparkhill and Ladywood mean that he was able to offer a perspective on the realities of living in 'Irish' and 'Non-Irish' areas.

<sup>vi</sup> It is important to place these experiences against the backdrop of a period spent in hospital and a children's home in Birmingham.

<sup>vii</sup> ID88 later confirms that she would not identify Ireland as 'home'.

<sup>viii</sup> ID65 has not visited Ireland and his impressions of Ireland appear to be largely based upon the opinions of others.

<sup>ix</sup> This incident occurred in Wales

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<sup>x</sup> It is somewhat disturbing that 'Irish jokes' are being told in an environment with such a heavy Irish presence and does not offer much credence to the notion that Irish pupils are receiving a culturally appropriate and sensitive education within this setting.

## **Chapter Ten: Conclusions**

### ***(10.i) Introduction***

Having outlined a number of theoretical arguments during the opening chapters of this thesis and then cemented these with the analysis of the twin stages of the fieldwork, it is now important to draw these strands together, in order to outline the findings of the thesis.

I begin by dealing with the principle concerns outlined at the onset, firstly, to examine the processes of identity formation and secondly, to explore the fruits of these processes; the labels which 'Second-generation Irish' people adopt as badges of their identity and the rationales they offer for the adoption of such approaches. At each stage I relate the analysis back to the theoretical underpinning offered in the earlier chapters. I also offer suggestions as to possible ways forward in respect of specific issues raised by this research, including the scope for further research.

### ***(10.ii) An exploration of the principal findings - Processes of Identity Formation***

I began this thesis by forwarding the notion that identity is constructed, fluid and highly contextual. The fieldwork findings of this research reinforce the salience of each of these points for the experiences of the current research population. In particular the findings underline Jenkins' emphasis upon the role of individual's interaction with other elements within society, initially through the processes of socialisation, in shaping her/his identity.

### ***Socialisation – Primary Influence***

The primary influences within the lifelong processes of identity formation are invariably occupied by the individual's parent(s). Parent(s), as invariably the first and potentially the longest serving influence, shape the individual by supplying her/him with a range of stimuli. They potentially provide everything from supporting the individual in learning to walk and talk, in shaping her/his sense of moral judgement and affording access to Irish culture.

The all-encompassing role of the parent(s) is stressed by the number of subjects who highlight their parent(s) as the most important influence upon their lives and the significant periods of time given over to discussions of the role of parent(s) during interviews. I do not suggest that parent(s) exclusively control the direction and experiences of the individual, rather that they occupy a unique role within the life of the individual.

***Finding: Parents play a primary role in shaping identity of the individuals in a myriad of different ways***

### ***Socialisation – Secondary Influences***

The parent(s)' influence also extends to controlling access to an array of secondary influences, acting as a gatekeeper to a range of stimuli, which compliment and take-over from the parent(s) at various stages in the individual's life. This control extends to almost all aspects of the individual's life, to family members, Ireland, friends, religion, Irish culture and a host of other influences. As accounts relating to the



concealing of non-attendance at church stress, parental influence can stretch beyond childhood into adulthood.

***Finding: Parents occupy a key role in controlling access to secondary phenomena that impact upon the individual's identity.***

The fieldwork data also demonstrates that parents are supported in socialising the subject by a number of other individuals. Foremost amongst these are individuals who form a particularly strong personal relationship with the subject, occupying the role of confidant, a link with Ireland and parental substitute. The role of 'significant other' is most likely to be taken on by grandparents and aunts.

***Finding: 'Significant Others' play a fundamental role in the lives of a considerable number of the interview subjects.***

One arena of personal influence, which is not controlled by the parent(s) exists in relation to the process of establishing relationships and 'starting a family', these are perceived to represent a clear watershed in the life of a number of subjects, signalling their move away from the family into a new unit of their own. This has a number of effects, dependent upon the ethnicity of the partner. In extreme cases this may lead some individuals to move away from a sense of Irishness or other to strengthen such associations.

***Finding: The establishment of personal relationships and having children represents a significant landmark within the lives of subjects and has a particular effect upon the individual's sense of identity.***

During the course of her/his life an individual is subject to the influence of a myriad of potential stimuli. As the various stages of the fieldwork and analysis reflect, this covers a plethora of personal contacts and social phenomena, including other people, social institutions such as education, geographical factors, including contact with Ireland and Birmingham and experiences of abuse and questioning.

The significance of parental control is again witnessed in relation to a phenomena such as religion. The individual's experience of religion is heavily shaped by their parent(s)' religious beliefs. Where parent(s) are members of a religious group, they are likely to initiate the child in the rites of this faith. This will not only shape the individual's spirituality and sense of morality, but also their circle of friends and determine their choice of school. Thus religion, through the initial facilitation of parents, plays a fundamental role.

***Finding: Religion was perceived to have played a key role in shaping identity amongst the research population.***

The longer reaching influence is stressed by subjects' responses in respect of their behaviour in adulthood:

***Finding: A number of the subject report that they continue to participate in religious activities, although a number suggest that this takes different***

***forms to that they experienced in childhood and that practised by their parents.***

This is also underlined by their attitudes towards religion, even those who subsequently ceased to participate in religious activities or ceased to 'believe', they still largely offer favourable interpretations of their religious associations.

***Finding: The majority of respondents perceive that participation in religious activities, whether in childhood or subsequently, has been beneficial. Even where they have ceased to be practising participants.***

Religious participation represents one of a multiplicity of factors which impact upon the individual's sense of identity, leading the individual to continuously, consciously and sub-consciously reformulate and realign her/his identity. It is in the accumulative impact of these factors that one begins to uncover the nature of the individual's identity and the series of processes which afford it life. This research has underlined the notion to which a series of influences help shape the individual's sense of identity.

***Finding: A multiplicity of factors help shape an individual's reality, constantly leading the individual to re-evaluate the interpretation in response to each influence.***

The sense that an individual's identity is shaped by a multiplicity of influences, spearheaded by the parent(s), serves to underscore the principles that identity is

always constructed, fluid and contextual. Each of these disparate factors build up, layer upon layer, shaping and constantly changing the individual's interpretation of their identity, a fluidity which is stressed by the fact that something could happen today which could ultimately shift one's personal identity. For example, the events of 21<sup>st</sup> November 1974 irrevocably shaped the perceptions of their identity amongst a section of the research population in Birmingham. Finally, it is important to underscore the notion that identity construction is always undertaken according to the context in which the individual finds her/himself. In this case, the individual is situated within the reality of having been born and principally socialised in Birmingham, with parental links and direct access to Ireland and within the constraints of their immediate personal relationships. I inevitably return to discuss these phenomena at various points of the remainder of this chapter.

Having determined the ways in which the individual constructs her/his identity, it is now important to explore the fieldwork findings in relation to the labels which individuals chose to signal their personal identity to others within Irish and British society.

### ***(10.iii) An exploration of the principal findings – The Labels Chosen***

Both phases of the fieldwork stress that members of the subject population adopt a range of different labels as indicators of their identity. There is no single label or set of labels which is universally acceptable to and is adopted by all members of the research population. For example, it is not possible to conclude that all subjects adopt either the 'Irish' or 'British' national labels.

***Finding: There is not a single label or set of labels of identity, which is universally adopted or acceptable to the research population.***

As I have previously argued, it is inevitable that the methodological approach adopted should produce interview data which suggests such an outcome, however the interview participants reflect the wider survey respondents. Similarly, the sheer number and combinations of labels selected demonstrates the differing attitudes amongst the subject population and offers a suggestion of the divergent experiences of this grouping.

Some respondents adopt a single label, 'Irish', 'English', 'British' or 'European', which they perceive to reflect specific dimensions of their experience and heritage. For others there is a preference for a series of labels which reflect different aspects of their experience. The responses of participants to both phases, but most noticeably those within the interview phase of the research, closely reflect the four strategies of ethnic identification forwarded by Hutnik and detailed in Chapter Three.<sup>1</sup>

#### ***(10.iv) Hutnik's Strategies of Identification***<sup>2</sup>

Firstly, there are those who adopt the 'disassociative' strategy and reject any form of association with the identity of the majority British/English grouping. This is represented by those who choose 'Irish' as their sole label. Such individuals rationalise this approach by emphasising their association with Ireland, experiences within Irish communities in Birmingham and for some, the notion that they were born in Birmingham by default. In a number of cases, there is a suggestion that this is the only natural route open to them. This emphasises that their parent(s) are Irish, they have been socialised in Irish settings, thus leading them to reject any

suggestion that they may be British. **(ID27, ID33, ID72, ID104, ID107)** This then prompts the question: why should this be so?

### ***'Dominant Group Ethnicity' and the 'British' Label***

The formulation of identity is not simply tied into the individual's relationship with other people and institutions within society. There are also, as the theoretical chapters suggest, other fundamental influences which impact upon these processes; these are rooted in the nature of the Anglo-Irish historical relationship.

The role of the 'Dominant Group' in shaping the identity of minority groupings within society, as explored in Chapter Five, is clearly stressed by the findings of this research. The colonial nature of the Anglo-Irish colonial relationship, the historical inferiorisation of the Irish, on-going situation in Northern Ireland and perceived 'crises of Britishness' are all evident in the discussions which took place with regard to the nature of the individual's personal identity.

It is important to note that of those who seek to incorporate a form of 'British' identity only (i.e. one which indicated an attachment to either a 'British', 'English' or a British local label), less than half of the survey participants (48.3%) select the 'British' national label from a prescribed list of potential labels. Whilst it is not possible to construct an argument which posits that this is a small percentage of respondents, I would argue that if the nature of the Anglo-Irish relationship was less contentious, one could reasonably expect that the 'British' national label would be an all but universally accepted label. To support this I look to the American situation, in which the 'American' is, almost without fail, used in conjunction with an 'Irish' label. Central to this approach is the relationship between host and settler. The nature of dominant/minority ethnic identities and the relationship between Britain and Ireland

ensure that the 'British' label is problematic for a substantial percentage of respondents (51.7%).

***(i) Anglo-Irish Historical Relationship and Colonialism***

For a number of subjects the problematic nature of the 'British' label is heavily bound up in the colonial nature of the Anglo-Irish relationship. Repeated references are made to the notion of England/Britain's historical overlordship of Ireland, which lies at the heart of this relationship. **(ID33, ID72, ID74, ID88, ID104, ID107, ID110)** Such suggestions are accompanied by references to exploitation and various modes of ill treatment, which leave the 'British' label severely tarnished amongst a section of the respondents. The actions of the past make the label unacceptable in the present. This is most vehemently stressed in relation to those respondents who include an 'Irish' label as part of their badges of identity, only 15 of these individuals also adopt a 'British' label.

***Finding: The Anglo-Irish historical relationship ensures that it is problematic for a section of the research population to adopt a 'British' national label of identity.***

***(ii) Northern Ireland***

'Britishness' is similarly tainted by events in Northern Ireland, which is perceived to make it impossible for some subjects to embrace such a term. It is interesting to note that eleven subjects indicate at different stages of the interviews and in response to different questions, that the Northern Ireland conflict has affected their

considerations of the 'British' and 'English' labels of identity. **(ID16, ID27, ID33, ID65, ID72, ID74, ID88, ID104, ID107, ID109, ID110)**

Concerns relating to Northern Ireland and the 'British' label are clearly underlined by the responses of those who have parental links into one of the Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. Both subjects dismiss the 'Northern Irish' label because of consideration of the situation in Northern Ireland.

***Finding: Events in Northern Ireland play a significant role in shaping the identity of members of the research population.***

***(iii) 'Crises of Britishness'***

Whilst I argue that much of the concern regarding the 'British' national label is rooted in the Anglo-Irish historical relationship, colonialism and Northern Ireland, it has not been possible during the current research to fully determine whether these attitudes are also shaped by wider 'Crises of Britishness'. Any such an exploration would have to be conducted as part of an examination of English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and other ethnic communities' attitudes towards notions of British national identity. After all, the reactions of this population relating to the 'British' label may merely reflect a wider societal rejection of the term.

***Suggestion: There needs to further research into notions of Britishness and attitudes towards the 'British' national label, across all communities within British society.***



However, there are two areas in which a notion of the existence of 'Crises of Britishness' was stressed. Firstly, some of those who reject the 'British' label, do so because it is seen as being too broad, because it includes Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish people. Secondly, there is considerable confusion amongst many of the interviewees between the terms 'British' and 'English', specifically in relation to the aforementioned question of England and Britain's colonial past. This led subjects to dismiss these different labels for the same reasons. For some subjects, colonialism was cited as the reason why they rejected the 'British' label, whilst for others, it is Englishness which is most inextricably tied up with such connections.

***Finding: There exists considerable confusion amongst the subject population regarding the relative merits and significance of British and English labels.***

The role of 'Dominant group ethnicity' within identity construction processes amongst the research population is similarly witnessed in relation to current attitudes towards the Irish within British society and principally the public manifestation of anti-Irish sentiments which is stressed by the number of respondents who report experiences of verbal and physical abuse. I return to explore these at a later point in this chapter.

Anti-Irish sentiments affect individuals in very different ways, dependent upon her/his personal circumstances. The individual may not be exposed to any negative images or messages regarding the Irish. Alternatively, the different messages the individual receives from various quarters may create a conflict between a sense of

Irishness and Britishness. Finally, the negative images and messages may lead the individual to jettison any sense of Irish identity.

Secondly, Hutnik identifies the 'assimilative' strategy, whereby the individual jettisons any reference to membership of the minority ethnic grouping and embraces a majority group identity. In this case, those who identify exclusively as 'British' and/or 'English' and do not incorporate an acknowledgement of their Irish heritage within their personal labels of identity. **(ID90, ID109, ID110)** Here the emphasis is most frequently on the fact that the individual was born in Birmingham, socialised within local society and consequently does not perceive her/himself to hold the same connection with Ireland as her/his parent(s).

For others, there is a suggestion that they do not feel comfortable identifying as 'Irish', because they were not born there and they therefore seek to acknowledge other aspects of their heritage within the labels they select.

***Finding: For a number of the subjects there are problems associated with adopting 'Irish' as their sole single label.***

Thirdly, the 'acculturative' strategy, whereby the individual identifies her/himself equally in terms of majority and minority identities. This is reflected in those subjects who forge an identity which combines aspects of Irish and British or English identities. These include individuals who describe themselves as 'Irish-Brummie', 'Birmingham-Irish', 'Irish-Briton' and 'Anglo-Irish'. **(ID16, also ID45, ID65, ID74, ID108)** Here individuals repeatedly stress, either that they wish to acknowledge both facets of their heritage, which they hold in equal affection or alternatively, see

one dimension as the primary focus of their identity, but wish to acknowledge other aspects of their reality. The use of multiple forms of identity allows the individuals to stress and hold onto different dimensions of their heritage.

In addition to those who explicitly select multiple labels to reflect their identity in the survey stage, there were also a number of indicators which suggest that a number of those individuals who select a single label of identity were keen to reflect their attachment to other aspects of their experience. For some this took the form of an acknowledgement that whilst they identified themselves as Irish, they were inextricably located within British society and accordingly articulated some form of emotional or geographical attachment to a form of identity which signalled this connection. For example, they adopt labels such as 'Second generation Irish' or 'Irish-descent', which, whilst appearing to be fixed around the Irish element, offer the suggestion of a connection with the British element of their experience. The reference to 'descent' or 'Second-generation' offers a nod to the fact they have a connection to Birmingham, whilst acknowledging the nature of their relationship with Ireland. For others this took the form of a begrudging acknowledgement that they are 'technically' a 'Brummie', 'British' or 'English'. **(ID107)**

Within the responses of other subjects there is a suggestion that the individual feels compelled to select either a 'British' or 'Irish' label, because as one respondent states: "maybe I thought you could only pick one." **(ID90)** This notion of having to make a choice between two poles is one, which appears to have shaped the experiences of some respondents. Could it be that such individuals would like to acknowledge both dimensions of their heritage, but have given in to those within British and Irish societies who have told them that they are 'British' or 'Irish'?

Whilst it is not possible to suggest that these disparate sub-groups that adopt multiple labels articulate the same forms of identity, there is sufficient evidence to proffer the conclusion that multiple forms of identity represent an approach which is adopted by a significant section of the research population. What these different combinations of labels stress is the attempt by individuals to offer an acknowledgement of their association with different groups and locations. Whether one identifies as 'Brummie-Irish', 'Anglo-Irish', 'Irish descent' or 'Black-African-Caribbean-Irish-Brummie', one is acknowledging the duality experienced by someone who has been born and socialised in Birmingham, but traces an aspect of their heritage to Ireland and/or elsewhere.

For a significant number of respondents, the use of multiple labels of identity represents their common reality; single labels do not adequately reflect who and what they are. This represents one of the foremost findings of this thesis.

***Finding: Multiple Identities represent a form of identity which is adopted by a substantial number of subjects, allowing them to reflect different national, ethnic, social and regional associations in the labels they select.***

The fact that 37% of survey respondents indicate that they adopt a single label of identity, in each case a national label, stresses the degree to which members of this research cohort look to different combinations of labels in order to reflect different aspects of their heritage and experiences. This indicates that there needs to be a conscious move away from essentialist approaches to Irish identity, such as that advocated by a former director of Liverpool Irish Centre in the introduction, in which the individual is effectively forced to make a choice between being 'Irish' or 'British'.<sup>3</sup>

A more open approach allows individuals to adopt labels which reflect different dimensions of their experience, without experiencing a feeling that they are in some way betraying one side or the other.

There is however one area of concern, whilst a number of the individuals are happy to articulate such an identity, the fact that a small sub-section of this grouping have hidden aspects of their personal identity in particular settings and others felt that they were effectively forced to make a choice between being 'British' or 'English' and 'Irish' suggests that such interpretations are not universally welcomed within elements of wider British and Irish societies. The reality is that these are identities that individuals adopt, yet many may be reticent to proclaim these identities in any public way.

***Suggestion: There needs to be more positive affirmation of multiple forms of identity within the Irish community in Birmingham in order to get the message across that it is possible to be both 'British' and 'Irish'.***

The significance of multiple identity forms is also stressed by the responses subjects offer in relation to the 2001 Census. When faced with a clear choice between ticking 'British' or 'Irish', a significant proportion of those interviewed state that they would utilise the 'Other Box', to write in a term which reflects different aspects of their reality. If this is reflected within the wider subject population, this has implications for the way in which this data is handled.

***Finding: In relation to Census 2001, a considerable number of the subject population are likely to use the 'Other' box, in order to reflect different dimensions of their identity and experiences.***

Finally, Hutnik identifies the 'marginal strategy', whereby the individual rejects both majority and minority dimensions and embraces an identity which concentrates on the significance of another component of their social identity. This is personified by the actions of ID01 who, guided by the acknowledgement that she is not wholly, 'Irish', 'Polish' or 'British', identifies herself as 'European', as this most adequately reflects the different aspects of her heritage. **(ID01)** In such cases, the individual, rather than choose between competing identities, between 'British' and 'Irish' labels, looks to a less contentious alternative. This may suggest a latent desire on the part of a section of this research population to embrace a form of identity which reflects different aspects of their heritage, but which they feel they were prevented from doing so by the attitudes of others within society.

Hutnik's model offers a useful approach to the question of identification which is easily applied to the situation of this research population, as it mirrors the different approaches to self-identification adopted by members of this grouping. There are undoubtedly amongst those who were surveyed and interviewed, individuals who have decided to assimilate themselves into British society and isolate themselves from any sense that they are 'Irish', whilst others hold on to differing degrees of attachment to Ireland and Irish identity. This is reflective of the wider, multi-generational Irish community in Birmingham.

As the overview of Hutnik's strategies stresses, the reality of duality is central to the experience of the current research population. This duality is stressed at a number

of stages of the fieldwork, underlining the individual's links with Ireland and Britain.

***(10.v) Duality – Birmingham and Ireland***

As I have already established, the individual is born and socialised in Birmingham, mixes with members of wider local society, participates in a range of activities and attends local schools. Within this context, the individual is unavoidably located within British society, with many of the secondary influences which I have previously identified being 'British'. The other facet of this reality is that at so many points in her/his life, the individual experiences contact with Ireland, Irish people and Irish culture. Clearly evident at each stage of the analysis is the distinction between Irish and British, principally Birmingham factors.

Before embarking on the research, I perceived that concerns regarding competing demands would lead many individuals to embrace a localised form of identity, which was considerably less value-laden than either national label. However, such associations are not universally accepted by respondents. Only 32.6% of survey respondents included a local label amongst their labels of identity, a figure which I suggest is surprisingly low, considering that the survey subjects were born in Birmingham. This is partially explained by a recognition of regional stereotypes of 'Brummies' as 'thick'. Once again we see the power of external categorisation for processes of personal identity. Interestingly, of those that did adopt the 'Brummie' label, only two did so with any warmth or conviction, with a small number adopting the term in order to locate themselves geographically within British society.

***Finding: Local labels of identity do not provide a wholly satisfactory and universally accepted alternative to disputed national labels, instead they merely provide an individual with a sense of geographical location in Britain.***

Whilst individuals may perceive that they do not adopt a local dimension within their principle labels, it is important to record the significance of locality within the experiences of this grouping. Members of this population have been socialised within Birmingham and many of their central influences will be rooted in these experiences. These may even have been internalised to such an extent that the individual does not attach any particular significance to them, in relation to the formulation of their identity.

This is particularly significant in the case of Birmingham, which has a specific experience of Irish settlement and has been so heavily shaped by the events surrounding the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings'. These events irrevocably changed the relationship between the community and the remainder of local society, sponsoring a ferocious backlash against the local Irish community. It is within this environment that the community continued its development and the grouping that sits at the heart of this study were socialised. The bombings sponsored a period of approximately twenty years in which it was extremely problematic to be 'Irish'. It is against this backdrop that this research is situated.

In addition to being socialised within a family setting in which there is an Irish presence, many have interacted with other Irish people, many of their friends may be from Irish families and the cultural activities in which they participate may be Irish. It would be difficult to categorically conclude from current study that access to



Irish culture, other Irish people and Ireland inevitably lead to the formulation of identities which incorporate an Irish dimension, for there are a number of subjects who have had such access, yet do not identify as 'Irish'. Similarly, there are those who perceive themselves to have been denied such access, yet now articulate an Irish identity. It is however permissible to suggest that access to these stimuli increases the likelihood of an individual formulating such an identity.

***Finding: Access to Irish culture, Ireland and other Irish people increases the likelihood of the individual adopting an Irish dimension within their identity.***

A further manifestation of this duality is underlined by respondents' emphasis upon the importance of 'Irish areas' in fostering a sense of Irish identity. This was true of both those who perceive themselves to have been socialised in such areas and those who do not. For example, those who had grown up in areas such as Sparkhill or Erdington, with large Irish communities make repeated references to the presence of other Irish people, cultural activities and visible symbols. Whilst for a number of others who had been socialised outside such areas, there was a perception that they had missed out in some way.

***Finding: Location is perceived to be an important factor in the processes of identity formation, specifically in relation to whether the individual had grown up in an 'Irish area'.***

The individual's connection with Ireland is also stressed by the propensity for childhood visits to Ireland, which offer access to members of one's extended family,

a range of different experiences and allows the individual to position her/himself within Irish society.

***Finding: Visits to 'Ireland' play a fundamental role in the lives of the subject population and in shaping their identity.***

This is underscored by the high percentage of participants who continue to visit Ireland on a regular basis. 84.3% of participants have visited Ireland during adulthood and 49.3% do so on an annual basis.

***Finding: Visits to Ireland continue to play a considerable role in the lives of members of the subject population.***

### ***'Home'***

The significance of the degree of contact between the individual, Ireland and Irish stimuli is stressed by the respondents' perception of 'home'. The majority of subjects identify that the term 'home' was one which had been in common usage within their families as they were growing up. Repeated references were made to 'going home for the summer'. The common usage of the term is best stressed by the fact that some respondents, without prompting, used the term 'home' to refer to Ireland at a number of points during the interview process.

***Finding: The term 'Home' was in common use within the households of a majority of the interview subjects during childhood.***

For those who perceive Ireland to be 'home', the rationale for this varies for different subjects. For some Ireland is perceived to be their emotional and spiritual 'home', whilst for others, Ireland is the place where they perceive themselves to be truly comfortable. These attachments are similarly demonstrated by the notion of fulfilling a myth of return which is forwarded by a number of subjects.

***Finding: A significant number of subjects state that they see Ireland as 'Home'.***

The research population's experience of duality is arguably best witnessed by two case studies, these relate to the arenas of education and the abuse and questioning which members of this grouping experience. I now explore of each of these in turn.

***(i) A Case Study of Duality – Education***

The majority of respondents attended Roman Catholic schools and identify that they were surrounded by innumerable other children with familial links, frequently prompted by the religious orientation of the school and its geographical location. This ensured that such individuals were associating with 'Irish' children. For those who attended non-Roman Catholic schools, there were deemed to be few other children with Irish familial connections.

***Finding: For those who attended Roman Catholic schools, a considerable number of their peers were from Irish families.***

Despite the perceived differences in utilisation of types of schools, this is not reflected in the curricular and extra-curricular content of these schools. The majority of subjects report receiving little information regarding Ireland, via the formal school structures, even where 'Irish' children were perceived to represent the majority. Consequently, schools, regardless of ethos or religious denomination, do not incorporate aspects relating to Ireland. Where an Irish aspect is inserted, this invariably occurs as a result of the ad-hoc action of a particular teacher.

***Finding: The relative 'Irish' presence within schools is not reflected in the curriculum of these institutions.***

Whilst the absence of an Irish dimension within curricular activities of schools, the presence of other children with familial links to Ireland means that there is an Irish dimension to the individuals' experiences within the school setting. This may even counteract the absence of Irish dimensions within the curriculum.

***Finding: The presence of considerable numbers of other Irish children is likely to provide a more secure environment in which the Irish experience is normalised.***

In the absence of formalised education around issues relating to Ireland and specifically to Northern Ireland, many individuals report seeking information from members of their family.

***Finding: Informal mechanisms provide a way for a significant number of the subject population to gain access to aspects of Irish culture, information about Ireland and other Irish people.***

The accuracy of these responses are often wayward. In some cases this left the individual in possession of inaccurate information. This inaccuracy, coupled with wider society's apparent lack of understanding of events in Northern Ireland represent two of the strongest arguments for the insertion of Irish dimensions within the curriculum. Firstly, to support children with Irish familial connections and secondly to benefit of wider society.

The data suggests that a significant number of individuals attempt to compensate for the absence of information relating to Ireland and specifically Northern Ireland by seeking the views of those individuals around them. The data also records that in a number of instances this information was inaccurate. Such sources of information should ideally be secondary rather than primary.

***Finding: In the absence of formalised education around issues relating to Ireland and specifically to Northern Ireland, many individuals report seeking information from other people. The accuracy of these responses is often wayward, leaving individuals in possession of inaccurate information.***

Knowledge and information can provide an important influence upon an individual's sense of identity. Equally, its absence or the imposition of inaccurate information can leave a major gap within the socialisation of members of the subject population.

***Suggestion: There needs to be more formalised Irish input into the education system.***

***(ii) A Case Study of Duality - Questioning and Abuse***

Amongst the most illuminating fieldwork data relates to the issue of abuse and questioning. 52.8% of survey respondents report experiencing some form of abuse as a result of their Irish heritage. These range from experiences within schools, employment settings and in the street. A number of individuals record that they have experienced abuse on more than one occasion and in a range of settings. For example, ID27 reports that he has experienced verbal abuse or had her/his sense of identity questioned in public houses, Irish venues and within the workplace.

***Finding: The majority of subjects within both phases of the fieldwork report that they have experienced some form of abuse or questioning as a result of their heritage.***

A number of subjects recount a catalogue of incidents in which they have experienced verbal or physical attacks or a questioning of their identity. The duality of the research population is specifically underlined by the fact the respondents report multiple incidences of abuse, in different settings and from different sources within both British and Irish societies. In this respect, it would appear that the members of the research population are never fully accepted within either society.

***Finding: Individuals report experiencing abuse from different sources.***

Whilst not wishing to underplay the significance of the experiences which members of this grouping experience from non-Irish individuals within British society, which forms the main source of this abuse, I suggest that the abuse and questioning which they experience from within Irish society and from within their own communities potentially has a more profoundly detrimental effect upon the individual.

The notion that an individual who wishes to identify themselves as 'Irish', in whatever way, should have this identity most vehemently questioned by the very people and in the very situations in which they would expect to have it reaffirmed and endorsed is particularly disturbing. The individual, who has had her/his sense of Irishness questioned within local society in Birmingham, then faces the same questioning from other Irish people. This undoubtedly leaves he/him feeling rejected and confused.

This thesis posits that much of the questioning which individuals experience in Irish settings is firmly rooted in the inherent contradiction which sits at the heart of current conceptualisations of the Irish diaspora. Whilst millions of people scattered across disparate settings such as Birmingham, Melbourne and Boston embrace the concept of a world-wide, diasporic community of Irish people, this is not shared by those who remain on the island of Ireland. This can be explained by the failure of generations of Irish politicians and media commentators to offer the population a picture of the experiences of these communities and a notion of the existence of a diaspora which extends beyond the lighting of candles on New Year's Eve. The long-term absence of a who, where, why and how of Irish emigration means that it is not surprising that Irish society does not know how to relate to its returning migrants

and specifically the claims of their daughters and sons to an Irish identity. It is, inherent in the conceptualisations of diasporic formations that there exists a hierarchy of identities, which is guided by one's connections with the homeland. This suggests that those who remain at 'home' are the true carriers of Irish identity and that those of the successive generations who are born outside Ireland are consequently increasingly less Irish. It is this sense of hierarchy which I argue lies at the heart of much of the questioning which sections of the research population experience both in Ireland and from within their own communities. This leaves a number of options open to the individual. (S)he may react by standing firm and reasserting her/his sense of Irish identity. Alternatively (s)he may respond to being told by elements within British society, Irish society and her/his own community that (s)he is 'British', by rejecting the notion of being 'Irish' and simply agreeing with those who cast her/him as 'British'. Finally, (s)he may only identify her/himself as 'Irish' once (s)he is sure of the attitudes and reactions of those around her/him. In the latter scenario, the individual will largely seek to avoid public proclamations of their identity, they retain this identity, but are frequently forced to subsume it.

The central concern would be that a number of the interviewees have faced such questioning in each of the main environments in which they operate; within their local communities, within wider British society and during time spent in Ireland. On each occasion they are likely to be told that they are not Irish! The problem being that if they are told often enough, some may start to believe this and seek to jettison any sense of Irish identity. It takes a particularly strong individual to face repeated questioning of her/his identity and stand rigid in embracing a form of Irish identity.



***Suggestion: The different source of abuse and questioning mean that it is difficult for a section of this population to publicly embrace a form of identity which contains an Irish dimension. This may in turn lead individuals to offer different interpretations of their identity in different settings and with different personnel.***

This picture is supplemented by the fact that subjects also report a number of incidents of abuse as experienced by members of their family. These coupled with their own experiences may mean that for certain individuals such abuse has been normalised within their lives, leading particular individuals to dismiss such incidents as the 'usual sort of stuff'.

***Finding: Respondents also report a considerable number of incidences of verbal and physical violence experienced by family members and others.***

Many of these incidents, both personal and familial are rooted in the reactions of wider society to the Birmingham Pub Bombings, recounting examples of both verbal and physical attacks.

***Finding: The majority of respondents who recall the Birmingham Pub Bombings report personal experiences or negative incidents affecting members of their families.***

Subjects record that the events of the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings' have affected so many facets of their lives, from their experiences of abuse, through to their perceptions of their personal identity.

***Finding: The Birmingham Pub Bombings have profoundly affected members of the research population, both at an individual and community level.***

This is all of particular significance for this grouping because of the previously outlined issues relating to the adoption of the 'British' label. In a number of cases this meant that there are perceived to be distinct problems associated with two of the principle labels which one would assume to be the most appropriate. This undoubtedly leads a proportion to look to other forms of identification.

The three sources of questioning mean that within the different facets of their experience, members of the subject population are likely to be faced by a persistent contestation of their identity. There was an indication from a number of subjects that the answers that they gave regarding their identity were heavily shaped by the perceived identity and likely attitudes of the person asking the questions. At the most extreme level this manifests itself in individuals opting to conceal their identity in certain settings.

#### ***(10.vi) Treatment of the Research population***

The inclusion of a separate 'Irish' category within the ethnic monitoring section of the 2001 Census and generic research such as Health Survey for England, means that there will be an opportunity to collate multi-generational information about the

position and condition of the whole of the Irish community in cities such as Birmingham. This in turn will provide us with a fuller picture of the nature of multi-ethnic British society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, there is one final note of caution, it is all very well having a separate category for the Irish community in a whole welter of social research projects and initiatives, but as the findings of this study suggest, a significant proportion of this community may not feel comfortable utilising these boxes, often because of their previous experiences of questioning and the perceived attitudes of those who are collating the data, specifically where these are official bodies. For the Irish community to truly benefit from this new era of openness and investigation, the message must be transmitted that it is acceptable for individuals who are born in Birmingham, Manchester or London to identify as 'Irish' and that such individuals will not be greeted by shrieks of 'Plastic Paddy', but rather they will be embraced by their own community. Equally, if they wish to acknowledge different aspects of their cultural heritage and experience, this too should be acceptable. These messages can only come from within the Irish communities throughout Britain.

This thesis not only offers advice regarding the future actions of Irish communities throughout Britain; it also proffers a number of suggestions to both wider British and Irish societies. Firstly, to wider British society. If the members of the research population are socialised with a positive sense of their duality, then British society must firmly move beyond the stereotypical images which have historically been handed down and which continue to make periodic appearances within the media and which prompt irrational verbal and physical attacks upon members of the Irish population. These images are clearly visible to members of the research population, through the phenomenon of 'Irish jokes' and the widespread association between Irish people and drinking, violence and stupidity. These images undoubtedly shape

the individual's perception of their own identity, through the internalisation of these messages and their potential reluctance to disclose an Irish identity to others within British society.

***Finding: The majority of respondents view 'Irish jokes' and stereotypical depictions of Irish as extremely negative phenomena.***

Simultaneously, there needs to be a greater recognition of the role of the Irish in the development of a truly multi-ethnic Britain. This does not simply mean that the Irish are mentioned in the introductions to reports and then relegated to the margins when it comes to real issues of substance. This should start within the British education system, with a recognition of the history and culture of Ireland, as part of a bigger project in which the histories and experiences of all ethnic communities, including the dominant grouping are recounted. This would allow a greater understanding of the situation and culture of the Irish and other groupings and effectively normalise the Irish experience within British society.

For Irish society, a similar revisiting of recent history and current attitudes is prescribed. Future generations within Irish society should be given an insight into Ireland's experience as a country of mass-emigration and this should be supported by an examination of what happened to all those who left and the successive generations who still look back to Ireland as the seat of an aspect of their identity. This would lead to a reconceptualisation of who is and who can be Irish.

The common strand which runs through all three of these processes is the need to expand current thinking around all forms of identity, whether it is Irishness,

Britishness or Englishness. As the findings of this thesis demonstrate there should be a move away from narrow conceptualisations of identity, which revolve around single labels of identity, towards multiple forms which allow the individual to reflect different aspects of her/his heritage, experience and reality. Reiterating the earlier point, in relation to whether one can be 'British' and 'Irish', it is not only possible, but is a reality for thousands of 'Irish' people throughout Britain. However, as we have seen it is not always easy for those individuals concerned to proclaim their duality to others within the different societies in which they engage. I argue that the question of articulation has profound implications for the development of, or ultimate assimilation and absorption of the Irish communities in Britain.

#### ***(10.vii) The Future of the Irish Community in Birmingham***

Demographic shifts within Ireland have ensured that Birmingham has ceased to be a major site of Irish settlement. This in turn means that the future of the existing Irish community is reliant upon the nurturing of future generations. However, the responses of research subjects relating both to their own identity and that of their children suggests that the future of the Irish community in Birmingham is somewhat uncertain. These not only highlight the widespread questioning that members of the research population experience within both Britain and Ireland in relation to their identity, but also the fact that subjects are almost equally dismissive of the notion that their own children may be. It would appear that they are applying the same framework of analysis to their children's identity, as those who were born in Ireland applied to them.

Foremost amongst the sentiments in relation to their children is the sense that they were less Irish than themselves, in most cases there is perceived to be less of a

direct connection with Ireland. By applying the same type of analysis to the their children's identity as had been previously applied to them by people who had been born in Ireland, they merely serve to reinforce the existence of hierarchies of Irishness.

***Finding: It does not appear possible, in the minds of a number of interview subjects, to pass on a coherent form of Irish identity to the 'third generation' and beyond.***

If one accepts that one's identity is shaped by the influences and stimuli which surrounds the individual, then, if many of these phenomena are Irish, it should be possible to pass on a coherent Irish identity, which takes into account local realities, into the third generation and beyond. Indeed, there is a potential conflict brewing whereby individuals are being encouraged to participate in Irish cultural forms and afforded extensive access to Irish networks, yet are simultaneously being told that they are not Irish.

This situation may be hastening a move towards Gans' suggestion that the processes of assimilation and acculturation mean that by the third generation, the immigrant grouping is likely to have been absorbed into the wider population. This leaves the subsequent generations to cling to a pain-free 'symbolic' notion of their ethnicity. Whilst acknowledging that evidence from the current research suggests that this may well be the case, the very nature of ethnic identity formation suggests that this does not have to be so. I respond to Gans' assertions by arguing that, if one acknowledges the potential benefits of ethnic identification, one must also recognise the negative connotations of such actions. For the subject population this manifests

itself in the reactions of other members of society to their chosen modes of identification. The short response to Gans is that in this case it is likely that many of the individuals concerned would like to incorporate an Irish dimension within their labels of identity, but are deterred from doing so by the attitudes of others.

### ***(10.viii) Future Research***

Whilst there have been previous examinations of aspects and phenomena relating to the experience of the current research population, it still remains relatively early days in the study of this particular cohort. There remains considerable scope for further research in order to plot the position and situation of this grouping. There are currently a number of pieces of research which are being undertaken which will add considerably to the sum of knowledge of this grouping and its position within British society.<sup>4</sup> Even taking into account the contribution that these will make, there are a number of principle areas which require specific attention.

Most obviously, there needs to be further research into the experience of the research population in other cities in England. As I record, the situation in Birmingham, both in relation to the nature of Irish settlement in the city and the events of the 'Birmingham Pub Bombings' have heavily shaped the nature of identity formation within this grouping in the city. It is now important for further research to take place in order to provide a fuller picture of this grouping in other areas throughout England, so that we can begin to identify commonalties of experience between 'Second generation Irish' people in different settings.

There are also a number of sub-groupings within the research population whose experiences that this study has barely been able to touch upon. Firstly, there are individuals with links into one of the Protestant communities in either Northern

Ireland or Republic of Ireland. The small sample size used in this research project means that the relationship between these groupings and the processes of identity formation could only be partially explored. Whilst the current analysis is based on a minutely small sample, the responses offered indicate that 'second generation' Protestant identity would appear to take different forms and be influenced by different factors to others within the research population. For example, the subjects identify that they are surrounded by few other people from similar backgrounds and most notably, that members of this sub-grouping offer very different interpretations of what it means to be Irish and of who is and can be Irish.

***Suggestion: 'Second generation' Protestant identity would appear, from the current minutely small sample, to take different forms and be influenced by different factors to others within the subject population.***

There was most notably no obvious label which expresses these individuals' connection with Ireland in any explicit way. For such individuals, and for other members of the research population, there was an underlying suggestion of the relationship between Irish identity and Roman Catholicism.

***Finding: A clear link is made between notions of Catholic and Irish identity by a considerable number of subjects***

Secondly, this research has only been able to begin the process of exploring the experiences and identity of those individuals who would commonly be labelled as



'Mixed Race Irish', who have parental links into Irish and 'Black Caribbean', 'Black African' and 'Asian' communities. I have merely begun to explore the specific experiences of this grouping in relation to the forms of identity they adopt, their experiences of discrimination and the relationship between different ethnic cultures. This work now needs to be taken forward.

Despite these shortcomings, by attempting to explore the full diversity of individuals who were born in Birmingham with parents who had been born in either Northern Ireland or Republic of Ireland, this thesis has begun the process of investigation. This has allowed me to offer a number of preliminary suggestions based upon the limited sample available and to stress that the forms of identity forwarded by members of these groupings and the emphasis they place upon specific factors within the processes of identity formation differ significantly from those of other members of the research population. I now propose that it is necessary to undertake further research into the identity and experiences of both groupings.

***Suggestion: There needs to be specific research into the experiences and identity of 'Second generation Protestants' and 'Mixed Race Irish' peoples. This research must take into account the true diversity of these groupings.***

A further grouping which this study has not been able to concentrate upon, but which the current research highlights as an area of potential interest, are the subsequent generations of 'Irish' people. As the findings suggests it is implicit within the responses of a number of subjects that they perceive their children to be less Irish than themselves or to have been absorbed into wider British society. It would be interesting to conduct a further research study into identity of the successive

generation to determine whether these individuals share these perceptions. Consequently, I suggest that it would be most beneficial to conduct future research on a multi-generational basis, for example, comparing the attitudes of parents and offspring to the latter's' identity and different conceptions of identity amongst siblings.

There also needs to be extensive research into attitudes within Ireland, Irish society and Irish communities in Britain towards members of the research population and the notion that they are Irish.

The findings of this research demonstrate the significant levels of abuse and questioning which members of the research population have experienced. There needs to be further investigation into the nature of this abuse, the sources and settings in which these incidences occur and a full exploration of their effects upon the mental health and ill health of this grouping.

Once again I stress that this research represents one of the first steps in a long process and not a conclusive statement on the identity and condition of the Irish in Birmingham, let alone elsewhere in England.

### ***(10.ix) Conclusion***

The responses of subjects within both phases of the fieldwork demonstrate the diversity of experience within the current research population. This is similarly reflected in the array of labels which individuals select to signal their personal identity. This means that, as I have previously stated, there is no single type label, or set of labels which is universally embraced by all members of the research population. Of the array of labels embraced, some individuals include an Irish

dimension, whilst others reject such associations. Individuals offer very different interpretations of their connections with Ireland, Birmingham and other co-ordinates in their lives, however each of these is equally valid. It is the recognition of this fact which will signal the arrival of a truly developed multi-ethnic British society and a self-confident and an all-inclusive Irish diaspora of communities scattered across the world.

This research clearly underlines the notion that it is possible for members of the research population to formulate a form of identity which includes an Irish dimension, however, the ability of the individual to articulate this identity publicly is strictly influenced by, not only the individual's internal perception of their identity, but also their response to other people's perception of them.

The attitudes of individual respondents to the labels of identity which are available to them are heavily shaped, not only by the reactions of those around them, but also the over-arching impact of the eight hundred year old Anglo-Irish relationship upon the identity of members of the research population in Birmingham at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

There are undoubtedly distinct problems associated with adopting the 'British' national label, but equally there are concerns amongst sections of the research population regarding the use of the 'Irish' national label as their sole badge of identity. I argue that a number of these concerns emanate from the attitudes of other people and specifically those other Irish people who question their identity. The situation would appear to be that, as one would expect with each generation, a certain percentage of this grouping will assimilate into wider society and abandon any pretension to an ethnic identity. However, I argue that this process is being hastened by the attitudes of other members of British and Irish society. This

ensures that, in response to persistent questioning from different sources, a further percentage of members of the research population are giving into suggestions that they are 'not really Irish'. In addition there is a further grouping that will only disclose their ethnic identity to other members of British and Irish societies, once they are sure of the attitudes and perceptions of those individuals. This is likely to hasten the assimilation of the Irish community in Birmingham and create problems in relation to the mental health of those individuals who have feel compelled to abandon an identity which they feel comfortable with, because of the attitudes of other people.

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<sup>1</sup> Hutnik, N.1992, p.134

<sup>2</sup> Hutnik, N. Ethnic Identity, 1992, p.134

<sup>3</sup> Moving up the Social Pyramid, The Times, 16/02/71

<sup>4</sup> Walter, B. & Hickman, M. Irish 2 Project is currently being undertaken at the University of North London, Ph.D. studies are currently being undertaken by Campbell, S. Liverpool John Moores University and Arrowsmith, A. University of Staffordshire.

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## **Appendix one:**

### **Questionnaire November 1998**

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. By doing so you are helping to contribute to a PhD Research study of the Identity of people born in Birmingham, with at least one Irish parent or grandparent.

All the information you provide in answer to these questions will be treated in the strictest confidence. None of your responses or completed questionnaires will be passed on to anyone else.

The answers you give may be used in the final piece of research but they will not be directly attributed to you.

It is hoped that the responses to this questionnaire will ultimately lead to further research and there is an opportunity, on page 2, for you to say whether you would be interested in being part of this next part of the research.

Once you have completed the questionnaire, please return it, in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope to:

**Phil McCarvill  
Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations  
University of Warwick.  
Coventry, CV4 7AL**

**Before going any further, please answer the following questions to see whether you should go on to complete the full questionnaire.**

**(a) Are you eighteen years of age or older?**

Yes  If Yes, please answer the next question (b)

No  If No, You do not need to complete the full questionnaire.  
Thank you for your co-operation

**(b) Do you have any links with Ireland?**

Yes  If Yes, please answer the next question (c)

No  If No, You do not need to complete the full questionnaire. Thank you for your co-operation.

(c) What are your links to Ireland?

Were you born in Ireland?

Is at least one of your parents Irish born?

Is at least one of you grandparents Irish born?

Do you have any other links? Please specify.

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**Please go on to complete the full questionnaire.**

**Please complete the following details (This can be left blank if you prefer)**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Telephone No.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Fax No.** \_\_\_\_\_

**e-mail address** \_\_\_\_\_

**I would be interested in participating further in this research study.**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

If you have ticked Yes, you may be contacted in the near future.

If you ticked No – You will receive no further contact and any information you have offered during the course of the questionnaire will be treated in the strictest confidence. This information may be used in the research but will not be directly attributed to you.

**Many thanks for your help.**

**Phil McCarvill  
Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations  
University of Warwick  
Coventry  
CV4 7AL**

**Questionnaire  
November 1998**

**(1) Gender: Please Tick Appropriate Category**

Female

Male

**(2) Age: Please Tick Appropriate Category**

18-25 years

26-35

36-45

46-55

56-65

66-75

76-85

86+

**(3) Where were you born? Please Specify Country, County and City/Town/ Village.**

Country \_\_\_\_\_

County \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town/Village \_\_\_\_\_

If you were born outside Birmingham, please go to question (4)

If you were born in Birmingham, please go to question (5)

**(4) If you were born outside Birmingham, please state when you moved to Birmingham and which area of the city you lived.**

Which Year \_\_\_\_\_

Which part of the City \_\_\_\_\_

**(5) If you were born in Birmingham, in which area were you born?  
(If you were not born in Birmingham, please go to question 6)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**(6) In which area of Birmingham do you live?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**(7) Educational History from the Age of 11 Years: Please state names, places, dates and course names.**

**School**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**College**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**University**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Other**

\_\_\_\_\_

**(8) Do you have any of the following qualifications?**

Inter Cert. \_\_\_\_\_

CSE/O Levels \_\_\_\_\_

G.C.S.E.s \_\_\_\_\_

Leaving Certificate \_\_\_\_\_

A Levels \_\_\_\_\_

HND \_\_\_\_\_

NVQ \_\_\_\_\_

BTEC National Diploma \_\_\_\_\_

A Degree (BA/BSc) \_\_\_\_\_

MA/MSc/MPhil \_\_\_\_\_

PhD \_\_\_\_\_

A Professional Qualification \_\_\_\_\_  
**(Please Specify Which Ones)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**(9) Employment: Please indicate your current employment status:  
Are you currently?** (You may tick more than one box if appropriate)

Employed Full-time \_\_\_\_\_ **(Go to question 10)**

Employed Part-time \_\_\_\_\_ **(Go to question 10)**

Unemployed \_\_\_\_\_ **(Go to question 11)**

A Student \_\_\_\_\_ **(Go to question 12)**

Retired \_\_\_\_\_ **(Go to question 11)**

Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**(10) What is your current job or occupation?** Please state below.

\_\_\_\_\_

**(11) What was your previous/last job or occupation?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**If you are not currently a student, please go to question 13**

**(12) If you are a student, please complete the following details.**

Name of Course \_\_\_\_\_

Name of College/University \_\_\_\_\_

Part-time \_\_\_\_\_

Full-time \_\_\_\_\_

Year (First, Second etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Qualification \_\_\_\_\_

**(13) Marital Status: Are you currently:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Single

\_\_\_\_\_ Married

\_\_\_\_\_ Living with Partner

\_\_\_\_\_ Divorced or Separated

\_\_\_\_\_ Widowed

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**(14) Do you have any children?**

Yes    \_\_\_    **(If Yes – Go to question 15)**

No    \_\_\_    **(If No – Go to question 17)**

**(15) Please complete basic details for your children:**

First Name(s)	Age	Male/Female	Place of Birth
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

**You may continue on a separate sheet, if necessary.**

**(16) How would you describe your children's nationality?**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Nationality</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**You may continue on a separate sheet, if necessary.**

**(17) Please complete the following details about your parents.**

	<u>Mother</u>	<u>Father</u>
Age (If still alive)	_____	_____
Place of Birth (County & Country)	_____ _____	_____ _____
Nationality	_____	_____
No Information known	_____	_____

**(18) Please complete the following information about any brothers or sisters that you have.**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Male/Female</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**You may continue on a separate sheet if necessary.**

**(19) Have you ever been a member of a religious group?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ Which one? \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

**(20) Are you currently a practising member of a religious group?**

Yes  Which One? \_\_\_\_\_

No

If you spent your childhood outside Ireland, please answer questions 21 & 22.  
If you spent your childhood in Ireland, please go straight to question 23

**(21) Did you visit Ireland on holiday as a child?**

Yes  **(If Yes go to question 22)**

No  **(If No go to question 23)**

**(22) How often did you visit Ireland as a child?** (Please tick relevant category)

Every year or more frequently

At least once every five years

At least once (During child)

**(23) Do you still visit Ireland?**

Yes  **(If yes, go to question 24)**

No  **(If no, go to question 25)**

**(24) How often do you visit Ireland?** (Please tick relevant category)

Every year or more often

At least once every five years

At least once in adult life

**(25) Have you participated in any of the following activities at different stages of your life? (Please tick the relevant ones)**

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Ever</u>	<u>In the last five years</u>	<u>In the last year</u>
Gaelic Football	___	___	___
Camogie	___	___	___
Hurling	___	___	___
Irish Dancing	___	___	___
Irish Language Classes	___	___	___
Irish Music Groups	___	___	___

**(26) Are you or have you ever been a member of any of the following Irish groups?**

	Currently a Member	Previously a Member
An Irish Centre	___	___
A GAA Club	___	___
Comhaltus	___	___
A Dancing School	___	___
Conradh na Gaelige	___	___
A County Association	___	___
The Connolly Association	___	___
Troops Out Movement	___	___
The Tuesday Group	___	___
Others (Please Specify)	_____	

**You may continue on a separate sheet if necessary.**

**(27) Have you ever purchased/read the following newspapers?**

	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Irish Post	___	___	___
Irish World	___	___	___

**(28) Which of the following National Football or other Sporting teams do you support?** (You may tick more than one, if this appropriate)

England	___
Scotland	___
Wales	___
Republic of Ireland	___
Northern Ireland	___
Other (Which One?)	_____
None	___

**(29) Have you ever experienced discrimination as a result of your Irish origins?**

Yes \_\_\_ (If Yes, Go to question 30)

No \_\_\_ (If No, Go to question 32)

**(30) What form(s) did this discrimination take?**

Verbal (Name calling or Irish jokes) \_\_\_

Physical Violence \_\_\_

Other (Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

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**You may continue on a separate sheet if necessary**

**(31) In what circumstances did you experience this discrimination?**

- School or college \_\_\_\_\_
- Employment/job related \_\_\_\_\_
- Social setting \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**(32) Are you involved in the work of any Irish community groups?**

Please tick the appropriate categories.

- Birmingham Irish Community Forum \_\_\_\_\_
- Irish Welfare and Information Centre \_\_\_\_\_
- Birmingham Irish Centre \_\_\_\_\_
- Birmingham Irish Women's Group \_\_\_\_\_
- Birmingham Irish Youth Group \_\_\_\_\_
- Cairde le Cheilé \_\_\_\_\_
- Birmingham Irish Mental Health Forum \_\_\_\_\_
- St Patrick's Day Parade Committee \_\_\_\_\_
- Others (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**You may continue on a separate sheet if necessary**

**(33) Which of the following labels would you use to describe your identity?** You can choose as many or as few of the labels as you like.

British \_\_\_\_\_

Irish \_\_\_\_\_

Northern Irish \_\_\_\_\_

English \_\_\_\_\_

Scottish \_\_\_\_\_

Welsh \_\_\_\_\_

African-Caribbean \_\_\_\_\_

African \_\_\_\_\_

Asian \_\_\_\_\_

Mixed Race \_\_\_\_\_

Brummie \_\_\_\_\_

European \_\_\_\_\_

Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**(34) Are there any labels, other than those relating to ethnicity or nationality that you would use to describe your identity? (Please specify)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**(35) Is there any thing else that you would like to say about yourself or your experiences, as a person of Irish origin?** Please use the space provided below.

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**You may continue on a separate sheet if necessary.**

**(36) If you have any comments on this questionnaire, any of the questions or the research, please use the space provided below.**

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**You may continue on a separate sheet if necessary.**

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.



## **Appendix Two: Copy of Interview Schedule**

### **(1) Personal Links**

#### **Parents:**

- Places of Birth of both parents – country and county/city*
- If one parent was born in Birmingham, where were their parents born – Ireland?*
- Date of arrival in Britain*
- Contact with during childhood*
- Still in contact with both parents – Now*
- Roles within childhood – Mother and Father*
- Association with Mother/ father – stronger during childhood?*
- Is this still the case?*

### **(2) Education:**

#### **School:**

- Which school did you attend?/ You attended X school in Y*
- Was it a Roman Catholic School?*
- Do you have positive memories of your time at school?*
- What was the ethnicity of the other pupils? How many Irish? / Were there many other children at the school from Irish backgrounds? Were you aware of this at the time?*
- Did you study any aspects relating to Ireland? (History, culture, language or sports)*
  - If yes, what were they?*
  - If no, would you have liked to?*
- Did you recall any of your teachers have a particular influence upon you at school? (role models)*
- Do you think that going to a Roman Catholic school had a positive or negative upon you?*

- *Did you have any negative experiences at school as a result of being from an Irish family? (Refer to discrimination section)*

### **College or University:**

- *Which course?*
- *Which city?*
- *If Irish studies course – why did you choose the course?*
- *If not – would have liked to do an Irish course*
- *Were you involved in an Irish society at college/university*

*If yes, involvement - Attitudes towards you?*

*If No, would have wanted to be involved in an Irish society/ what do you think of Irish societies?*

*Involvement in local Irish communities?*

### **(3) Religion:**

- *How significant do you think your being brought up a Catholic/Protestant?*
- *Role in Childhood*
- *Still Practising religionist – Importance?*
- *Importance of being Catholic/Protestant and being from an Irish family?*
- *Positive or negative effect?*
- *Do you think that there is a link between being Irish & Catholic/ Irish & Protestant?*

### **(4) Cultural activities:**

- *Participation as children (Which ones/when/where)*
- *Community Teachers (Role models)*
- *Significance of*
- *Level of participation*
- *Links with Ireland*

- *Contact with Irish people*
- *If not, why not? Would have liked to?*
- *Irish music/bands*
- *Participation now: (Community teachers or parents/ Importance of participation)*

## **(5) Personal Relationships**

### **Partner**

- *Ethnicity of*
- *Where were partner's parents born?*
- *Where did you meet?*
- *Commonality with 'Irish' partner or differences from non-Irish partner*
- *How do they feel about your identity?*

### **Children (Actual or possible):**

- *Intro question about children – Ages etc.*
- *How would you perceive/describe their identity? (What labels?)*
- *Do you or would you encourage your children to participate in Irish cultural activities?*
- *Contact with Ireland?*
- *What about your children's children, how would you identify them?*

### **(6) Friends:**

- *What are the ethnic background of your friends?*
- *What were their attitudes to your participation in Irish activities? (Peer pressure)*
- *Attitudes to your family background/identity?*
- *What was their attitude toward Irish people in general? Examples?*

### **(7) Socialising:**

- *Where do you go out socialising?*

- *Who with?*
- *Do you ever go to Irish venues or pubs? What do you think of them?*
- *What do you think of Irish theme pubs?*

**(8) Community Involvement:**

- *Are you involved in any Irish community organisations? (Birmingham Irish Community Forum, Irish Welfare Centre, Comhaltas, GAA etc.)*
- *How long have you been involved?*
- *In what capacity?*
- *Why do you think you became involved?*
- *Have you ever accessed an Irish agency such as Irish Welfare and Information Centre?*

**(9) Experience of Ireland:**

- *Visits as a child? – Frequency*
- *Who did you visit?*
- *What did you do*
- *Contact with family?*
- *Importance attached?*
- *What sort of reception did you receive? Examples*
- *What sort of memories do you have of these times?*
- *Still Visit Now?*
- *Reception*
- *Any negative experiences as a result of having been born in Birmingham or because of your accent? Examples*
- *Would you like to live in Ireland?*
- *Irish as trendy – change in perceptions of Ireland and Irish people*

### **(10) 'Home'**

- ❑ *What does the term 'home' mean to you?*
- ❑ *Was it used when you were growing up?*
- ❑ *How did/do you feel about this?*
- ❑ *What about Birmingham/Ireland as Home?*

### **(11) Sporting Teams:**

- ❑ *Which international team do/would you support?*
- ❑ *Why?*
- ❑ *How do other people (Friends and family) feel about this?*
- ❑ *What happens if it is England versus Republic of Ireland – Final of a major competition?*

### **(12) Role Models:**

- ❑ *Who/When/Why? (Teachers/Pop stars/Footballers)*
- ❑ *What influence*
- ❑ *Who were your Heroes? (And Now)*

### **(13) Northern Ireland:**

- ❑ *Feelings when bombs went off in NI and Britain?*
- ❑ *How did it make you feel about coming from an Irish family?*
- ❑ *What were other people's reaction to you and your family?*

### **(14) Birmingham Pub Bombings:**

- ❑ *Do you remember the Birmingham Pub Bombings – What are your recollections of the events?*
- ❑ *Own or Parents experience of the bombings – Examples*
- ❑ *What about the responses of members of local society*
- ❑ *What do you remember about the responses of the Irish community?*

- *What about the longer attitudes of members of local society towards the Irish in Birmingham?*
- *What do you think were the long-term affects of the Bombings upon Irish people and the Irish community in Birmingham?*
- *Do the pub bombings still have an impact? – Is it still significant? How?*
- *Has it affected the way that you behave and your identity?*

**(15) Terms of Abuse/Discrimination:**

- *How do you feel about Irish jokes?*
- *What would do if you heard an Irish joke being told?*
- *You stated in the questionnaire that you experienced discrimination or abuse as a result of being from an Irish background. Can you tell me a little about this? (Context/Birmingham, How did this make you feel?/ How did this make you feel about being Irish/Was this an isolated incident?)*
- *Did you ever experience any negative reactions, abuse or discrimination in Ireland? (Examples/Who/Why/How did this make you feel?/Isolated incident)*
- *How were the attitudes different in Ireland and Birmingham/Britain?*
- *What do you think about the term 'Plastic Paddy' (Who used it?/Attitude/ How does this make you feel?)*
- *Are you aware of the Prevention of Terrorism Act?*
- *How you ever experienced any problems in relation to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) (Examples)*
- *Stereotyping (Individual and group) – Reactions when you say that you are from an Irish family?*

**(16) Labels:**

Labels adopted (refer to answer given in questionnaire)

- *Why did you choose those particular labels*
- *You choose one/more than one label – why?*
- *How long did it take to decide on which labels to choose?*

- Were there any labels you thought about ticking but decided against it? If so, which ones?*

### **Birmingham:**

- Do you think of yourself as a Brummie?*
- What does it mean to you?*
- Is this a positive thing? (Sense of pride)*
- What aspects of local society do you participate in?*
- Do you see Birmingham as 'home'?*
- Do you think that the Irish are valued within local society?*

### **Are you aware of the census in 2001? (Copy of Categories)**

- If yes, which of the following categories would you identify with? (Separate Sheet)*
- If No, brief explanation and then sheet*
- Select one category – this discussion about choice and why.*

### **Do you have a Passport?**

- Which one?*
- Why?*
- How did you decide which passport to get? (Period of consideration)*
- Did any one pass any comment on your choice of passport? (Parents/friends – Irish and Non-Irish)*

### **(17) General Identity:**

- Do you think that your identity has changed over time, or have you always seen yourself as being X? (In what ways – examples)*
- If you had to identify two or three factors that have had a particular influence upon your identity, what would they be?*
- Have you ever had any problems identifying as Irish? (Fear of negative response/reaction? If so, which situations/Who/Why do you think they responded in that way?)*

**Accent:**

- *What do you think about other people who were born in Birmingham with Irish parents who identify as Irish?*
- *Do you know people who adopt an Irish 'brogue' or affect an Irish accent? (Response)*

**(18) Who is Irish?**

- *Who do you think is or can be Irish?*
- *What do you think being Irish means/What does it mean to be Irish?*

**(19) Any additional comments**



## Appendix Three: Census 2001 – Ethnicity Section Categories

### Ethnic Group Question

Choose one section from (a) to (e) and then tick the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background

- (a) White
- British
- Irish
- Any other White background

- (b) Mixed
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed Background

- (c) Asian or Asian British
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Any other Asian Background

- (d) Black or Black British
- Caribbean
- African
- Any other Black Background

- (e) Chinese or any other ethnic group
-