

**"ETHNICITY AND INDIVIDUALITY: IRISH MIGRANTS IN LONDON,  
1980S-1990S"**

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IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
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### ABSTRACT

This thesis attends to the question of identity, specifically ethnic identity, as it related to around 50 young, professional "Irish" migrants in London. My informants were male and female, Protestant and Catholic and had emigrated during the 1980s and 1990s, from the North and Republic of Ireland. I consider how these individuals constructed and represented their ethnic identities; how they enacted them, through choice of Irish or non-Irish companions, for example; and how, in more general terms, "Irishness" was imagined.

I suggest that migration represented a "fateful moment" in my informants' journeys of self-discovery. Post-migration, they were able to re-evaluate their ethnic identities, away from the constraints of Ireland and the pressure of communal expectations which they had experienced there. This led to a selective identification with those aspects of their ethnic identities which they found they valued, as well as a rejection of those elements which may have helped prompt migration. Thus, in London, the content of their ethnic identities changed somewhat, as did their strategic, emotional significances.

I begin with a literature survey and overview of the subjects of ethnicity, identity and migration in Chapter 1, turning to urban research methodology in Chapter 2. My chapters then present my informants' journeys in the order of their unfolding, beginning in Chapter 3 with life in Ireland, as it was recalled in London; initial experiences in London (Chapter

4); and the establishment of social networks (Chapter 5). In Chapter 6, I present case studies of three Irish organisations and Chapter 7 focuses on representations of "Irishness", constructed after my informants have had some time in London to reflect on these. In Chapter 8 I begin by considering the topic of integration, then assess the appropriateness of "ethnicity" as an analytic tool to describe my informants' choices and self-understanding. I also investigate the overall meaning and relevance of ethnicity. I focus on religion and politics, two potent areas in the construction of "Irishness", in Chapters 9 and 10, before presenting my conclusions in Chapter 11.

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## CHAPTER 1

### IDENTITY AND ETHNICITY IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

"What to do? How to act? Who to be?" These, according to Giddens (1992:70) are "focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity". They are questions central to this thesis, which examines the lives and identities of a group of young, professional Irish people. My research has been into a set of around 50 young people, in their 20s and 30s, who emigrated from Ireland, North and Republic, during the 1980s and '90s and at the time of my fieldwork were resident in London. I was interested in discovering what sorts of lives these middle-class Irish people led, my central question being whether they felt their ethnic origin to be of relevance to them in London. As white, professional, English-speaking people, my informants were in significant respects similar to the English people they had joined. Did this similarity lead to a "forgetting" of their ethnic origin, either through its indistinctiveness, or its undesirability, or to a remembering which involved emotional attachment and/or an expression of this identity in a communal setting?

The themes of memory and forgetting are particularly salient ones in the narrative of identity, according to Anderson. (1991:204) He notes the documentary evidence of biography (birth certificates, diaries, medical records, letters and so on) which, paradoxically, emphasize both continuity and loss through forgetfulness of the individual history. Eriksen (1993:92-3) applies this specifically to nationhood and ethnic identity. It would thus seem important or inevitable to both

remember and forget. Is this the case for my informants? Did they value remembering their ethnic identity, prefer to forget it, or follow a policy of somehow doing both?

The "Who to be?" question is thus a vital one. This can be understood partly in terms of ideas, thoughts or feelings my informants have about their identity, while the questions of doing and acting ("What to do?", "How to act?") illustrate a more active part of the trio. This calls to mind Holy and Stuchlik's (1983) distinction between actions and representations: what we present as appropriate behaviour in an ideal situation differs from what we actually do, which indeed differs from what we present as appropriate in specific, concrete situations. So, I am interested in both what my informants said to themselves, to others and to me about their ethnic origin, and in what they did with regard to either emphasizing or ignoring it. I am also interested in whether these different levels were consistent or contradictory.

In this chapter, I shall outline a selection of the literature on ethnicity, identity and migration and my own position within this. In terms of ethnicity, firstly, I am interested in what happens to ethnicity post-migration, to the boundaries which are created around it, as well as to its cultural content. I do not see my informants' ethnicity as structurally determined, and therefore wish to privilege their self-designations and the ways in which they manipulate ethnicity to strategic ends. The 1990s have been characterised by just such a de-essentializing approach to



ethnicity. However, it is undeniable that structural constraints do affect my informants' autonomy; in addition, ethnicity has an emotional power which is often hard for them to resist. As such, their self-determination is not entirely under their own control.

The concept of identity, secondly, is central to this thesis. I look at some of the ways in which identity is understood, and again, at the relationship between internal and external definition which, following Jenkins, I suggest is a dialectical one. I propose that it is essential to acknowledge the importance of unconscious material in questions of identity, and I consider how Bourdieu can assist us in this endeavour. I also look at some of the difficulties which this involves.

The issue of identity leads inevitably to a consideration of how we perceive the individual in anthropological analysis, and I will detail a number of ways of doing this. Cohen's emphasis on the primacy of the self-conscious individual is the approach which is best suited to this thesis. Again, I do not wish to neglect context and structure, but emphasize the individual as capable of engaging with her contexts and constraints.

Thirdly, the literature on migration has changed considerably, moving away from the early assumption of fixity as the norm, to an emphasis on movement as characteristic of the modern age. I shall consider this context and then describe the changing character of Irish migration to Britain, including the three main migration movements from Ireland. This will

lead to a profile of today's Irish migrants.

I will suggest that these migrants leave to satisfy an aspiration for self-fulfilment and personal autonomy which conflicts with their desire to belong to their ethnic group. I will explore this conflict here and throughout the thesis. I shall also consider the role that migration has within this conflict and finish by outlining the contents of subsequent chapters.

### **ETHNICITY**

Ethnicity has, this century, become an "ubiquitous presence" in theory and in practice. (Banks 1996:1, 189; Jenkins 1997:11) I shall now highlight some key areas in the development of ethnicity theory relevant to the thesis.

In ethnicity's pre-history, the emphasis was on clearly defined groups, usually known as "tribes" or peoples, which possessed a language, a reasonably uniform set of customs, an objectively existing culture, and usually a territory. This representation lasted from early functionalism into the mid-1960s and included well-known names such as Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown and Fortes.

This approach was later criticised for its assumption of homogeneity in the group, which meant that internal divisions were largely ignored; for presenting a relatively static picture, de-emphasizing transience and change; and for presenting social groups as rigorously separate and bounded. (Jenkins 1997:17) Additionally, "tribe" began to appear pejorative and connected with anthropology's colonial heritage. In terms of migration, sociological modernization

theory emphasized assimilation to a dominant national culture. This was often seen as inevitable and some theorists even posited timescales. (Eriksen 1993:41-5; Banks 1996:66-68)

The second historical phase, from the mid 1960s to late 1970s, extended "ethnicity" to majority groups and modern industrial society. It emphasized ethnicity as relational, instrumental and transactable. Barth and Abner Cohen were major influences, each contributing in different ways to what Jenkins (1997:41) describes as the "social constructionist" model. Barth (1969) emphasized that individuals could cross ethnic boundaries and live as members of another group. He also made the revolutionary suggestion that the boundaries, as sites of interaction with other groups, were more important than the "cultural stuff" which they contained (although he suggested later (1994) that this did not entail a rejection of content per se). Barth's influence on ethnicity theory was enormous and his Ethnic Groups and Boundaries has been cited in over 350 articles over the last 10 years. (Banks 1996:47)

Cohen contributed in a parallel, but more reductionist way, emphasizing the political and economic interests which made ethnic groups vehicles for organizational monopoly and competition with other ethnic groups.

A third major figure during this period was Geertz, whose thinking developed in answer to political development modernization theorists, in quite a different vein. He suggested that in new states, old "primordial" loyalties, like religion, caste and ethnicity would act as brakes on nation-building modernity. The question of whether ethnicity was

"primordial" (Geertz' position) or instrumental or circumstantial, as Barth and others suggested, was a controversial one in this period. (Eriksen 1993:54-56; Banks 1996:39-47; Jenkins 1997:44-48) The primordial position was later discredited, but then rehabilitated as representing the emic view, (Banks 1996:40; Baumann and Sunier 1995:6-7) that is, promoted in nationalist ideology, and valued by the participants themselves.

A further controversy in this period was the relationship between "subjectivist" and "objectivist" approaches to ethnicity, emphasizing the perspective of the individual actors, or structural, macro forces, respectively. Barth, represented by Eriksen (1993:56) as subjectivist, suggested that ethnic groups were "organisation vessels" to be given whatever subjective content was deemed appropriate. Cohen (1974:x-xi) combined both approaches by positing the growth of ethnic symbols from subjective and individual to objective and collective, suggesting they began as individual and soft, and developed an independent, less malleable reality.

Part of the disagreement in this ongoing debate was the extent to which one should concentrate on the cultural content of ethnicity. Barth was one of the first to question its pre-eminence. Following his lead, Schildkrout (1974:191) suggested that cultural differentiation was secondary to

"the recognition of categories of ethnic identity defined according to some culturally accepted principle of differentiation",

that is, the principle of perceived difference. Others continued to emphasize the cultural content (Cornell 1996;

Jenkins 1997) and some suggested that certain cultural elements were common to all ethnic groups (for example, shared ancestry, religion and endogamy). (Eriksen 1993:34-5)

These approaches were subsequently marginalized by the temporary dominance of Marxism, which emphasized modes of production, class, domination and history, and de-valued "culture" (which it termed "ideology") and individual agency. All methodological individualist approaches were dismissed. Marxism, however, fatally underestimated the fascination and durability of ethnicity and nationalism. Marxists, like modernization theorists were caught off balance by the next phase, the "ethnic revival". (Banks 1996:78, although see Barth's caveat 1994:26-7.)

This revival entailed the empirical and then theoretical re-assertion of ethnicity, peaking in the 1980s. Across the world, political activists started to make political claims in terms of ethnicity and nationalism, despite the expectation that ethnicity would disappear with "modernisation, industrialisation and individualism". (Eriksen 1993:2) Melting pot theorists in the United States, equally, were perplexed by the realisation that the melting pot, which was "expected to fuse diverse populations into one" (Eriksen 1993:139; Banks 1996:67-74) had simply not delivered. This led to re-evaluation by social scientists.

Glazer and Moynihan (1981; 1984) were key writers in this phase; they suggested that ethnicity's salience was due to its effective combination of both an interest and an affective tie. Kilson (1981) developed this idea by suggesting that

ethnicity's affective appeal was that of traditional values in the face of sharp societal shifts, with its strategic efficacy also related to the nature of modern society: due to the existence of other groups with different norms and an ideology of egalitarianism, behaving as a group member became the most effective way to improve one's position.

Another focus in this period was migration-induced ethnic commitment and a key question was whether this was a new creation, (Glazer & Moynihan 1981) or the transference of something older from the country of origin. Kilson suggested that migration made ethnicity particularly salient, as it represented a condition of threat and upheaval. (Eriksen 1993:68)

The extent to which ethnic identity was achieved or ascribed, that is, freely chosen or imposed from the outside was also debated. (Eriksen 1993:56) The distinction between ethnic group and ethnic category is relevant here. (Wallman 1984:15-16; Banks 1996:133) Barth was criticised for neglecting ascription, but addressed this in later writings, where he emphasized power relations and structural forces. (1994; Jenkins 1997:52-7) Clearly, the inter-action between what Eriksen (1993:56) has called cognitive factors (involving choice and strategy) and structural factors (featuring external constraints) was an important one.

A related issue was how important ethnicity was to the individual. Wallman's conclusion (1982; 1984) was that ethnicity was not of primary importance in the South London contexts she was dealing with. This finding is important for

my general approach. Ethnicity, then, was a matter for enquiry, rather than a dimension which could always be assumed to play a key role.

In the 1990s, ethnicity is considered in need of deconstruction. (Baumann and Sunier 1995) The key argument is that ethnicity's explanatory power is usually minimal, and that the highs and lows of its salience themselves need explanation. The anti-essentializing thrust of postmodernist theory suggests that ethnicity is so constructed and manipulated as to have little social agency but also argues that individuals can emphasize identities, blur identities, and resist identities. (For postmodernists, all outcomes are possible.) The general thrust is against generalization, and structural determination. Thus, ethnicity is seen as one of many possible identities whose salience varies situationally. (Wallman 1982; 1984)

Old controversies are re-visited in this period in new ways. For example, Banks, (1996:185-7, 118) discussing the primordialist-instrumentalist debate, suggests that primordial understandings place ethnicity in the hearts of informants, and instrumentalists locate it in their heads; his suggestion is that ethnicity is located in the heads of observers, an analytic construct created to interpret modern processes of belonging and identity. The utility of "ethnicity" as an analytical tool is re-evaluated by many writers in this period. (Eriksen 1993:16, 157, 162; Jenkins 1997:47)

Revisiting the choice and ascription debate, Jenkins (1997:41, 63, 166) combines both, suggesting that ethnic identification

is a dialectical process involving both internal definition and external categorisation. He suggests that ethnicity is important on a range of levels, from primary socialisation and a corresponding association with the integrity of the self, to, at its most formal, official (ascribed) classification. This would suggest that ascribed identity is not important to the individual. However, as he later points out, through his concept of nominal identification and virtualities (see below), the consequences of an imposed identity can be enormous. Eriksen (1993:32-3, 66) suggests this debate is not only theoretical, but requires empirical investigation.

I shall now consider briefly the notion of "community". Ideas about "community" have needed re-definition in the urban context. A concept like Cohen's, (1985) which presents community as a symbolic construction, subjectively perceived and composed of various shared symbols and meanings, is more relevant to the urban situation than one which insists on geographical boundaries. Cohen goes further elsewhere, suggesting that community is,

"a masking symbol to which its various adherents impute their own meanings", (1986:13)

indicating the possibility of diverse understandings underneath a rhetoric of shared homogeneity.

This emphasis on manipulation and the actors' power to create and shape community is typical of current de-essentializing trends. Communities, following Cohen, require constant re-creation and re-validation or they lose their relevance, and it is to this end that they are talked or written about. This talking can involve considerable conflict, as Aretxaga (1997)



notes. Dawson (1998:216) too portrays "community" as something which can be manipulated and contested. In his example, community is dislocated from its objective referents, such as place, and relocated in terms of personal identity. In this context, communities are much more likely to be understood as multiple and overlapping, created and manipulated by individuals who may challenge official discourse, and not necessarily hinging on geographical proximity. (Baumann 1996:5-6; Ruane and Todd 1998:9-10)

I encountered live discussions about "the Irish community" in my research, which was clearly visualised as extending beyond Irish "urban villages" such as Kilburn. The use of the term "community" was often used strategically to gain funds or recognition, presenting a diverse group of people as homogenous and appealing to an assumed emotional attachment.

I will now discuss the distinction between nationalism and ethnicity, before moving to definitions of ethnicity. Eriksen suggests that nationalism and ethnicity are "kindred concepts" and that the majority of nationalisms are ethnic in character. He defines a nationalist ideology as,

"an ethnic ideology which demands a state on behalf of the ethnic group",

although he points out various problems with this distinction in practice. (1993:6, 118-19; Banks 1996:156-160) Gellner (in Banks 1996:126) suggests that nationalism arises when a high culture is reified, a population is relatively homogenous and there is a stable education system. It is thus a modern phenomenon arising out of the conditions of industrialism.

Anderson (1991) focuses on nations as imagined communities, a process facilitated by literacy, through print capitalism. Neither see ethnicity in the Geertzian primordialist sense as a necessary or sufficient factor in the rise of nationalism. For Smith, however, the ethnic unit precedes and is the basis for the nationalism. (Banks 1996:129) Jenkins, (1997:159; 142-164) lastly, suggests that a broad definition of the conditions for nationalism could include: an ideology of ethnic identification, ethnic criteria of political membership, a state context and a claim to a collective historical destiny.

Nationalism and ethnicity share certain features, including an emphases on metaphorical kinship. They are identities constituted in relation to others (Banks 1996:154-5)<sup>1</sup> and in rhetoric and practice, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are crucial to both. Tension and conflict between them are, however, common and may be inevitable where there are competing ethnic groups within a state. In this situation, the nationalist ideology of the hegemonic group will dominate less powerful groups. (Eriksen 1993:119) The seeds of ethnic dissension are, ironically, present in the State itself, as it makes this kind of self-presentation salient. (Herzfeld 1997:77; Banks 1996:138, 158-159)

Some writers emphasize variety in nationalisms. Herzfeld (1997:6) criticises Anderson for treating all nationalisms as alike and Cohen (1996) posits the idea of personal

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<sup>1</sup> Hobsbawm, however, sees nationalism and ethnicity as non-comparable. (Jenkins 1997:143)

nationalisms. I return to both of these ideas later. Jenkins contrasts the nationalisms of Northern Ireland and Wales, (1997:124-141, 147-163) and Borneman, (1992) Herzfeld, (1995; 1997) and Wilk, (1993) lastly, consider how individual/unofficial and State/official discourses intersect for Berliners, Greeks, and Belize nationals, respectively.

My definition of ethnicity focuses on the meanings of ethnic markers and on the existence of conflict, clearly relevant to Ireland's turbulent history. (Kells 1995:224) Ethnicity, I suggest, is the articulation of a common identity, based on the assertion of shared cultural heritage, as perceived by those sharing this background, and also by those who perceive themselves to be outside it. This may act as an organisational focus in situations of conflict, and its content or resonance may vary according to the existence of threat or other situation-specific characteristics.

This acknowledges the possibility of differences of opinion: for example, if an outside group considers you as part of a distinct ethnic group (for example, Irish), this is part of social reality, as is your opinion that you are not (but are, for example, British). It stresses subjectivities, collectivities, fluidity and the potential for conflict. Collective ethnic symbols, I suggest, gain in resonance beyond the individual, but are ultimately subject to individual revalidation.

To locate this approach in the debates mentioned above, it emphasizes the subjective meaning of ethnicity for individual actors. I acknowledge the importance of outside constraints,

which can be as simple as the views of other individual actors. These constraints are also found within the ethnic group, and indeed the individual. (Banks 1996:36; Eriksen 1993:56-57) The role of the State will appear in the thesis only insofar as my informants comment on it, although I will consider the impact of its policies on my informants in Chapter 3. I am interested in the boundaries around ethnicity: who is inside and who is outside a particular classification, and whether there are degrees of belonging as Eriksen suggests, but I also wish to detail the content of the criteria for belonging, or, what exactly one is belonging to.

My definition privileges instrumentality, but drawing upon Glazer and Moynihan's (1981) distinction between affect and interest, I consider the emotional bond of ethnicity to be worth as much attention as its instrumental use. I wish to investigate whether migration leads to new forms of ethnicity, or the transposition of previous expressions, and whether this ethnicity is important in the new context or not. Finally, I locate myself within the current, de-essentializing phase of ethnicity studies and hope that I avoid the reifications and assumptions which are always a risk in this field.

#### **IDENTITY**

If "ethnicity" as an analytic term has outlived its usefulness, as some suggest, "identity" may well be replacing it. Rouse proposes that the discourse of identity has, in the last 15 years in the U.S., become the primary medium for understanding

"the relationship between the political and the cultural, the subjective and the social" (1995:351)

and Kearney (1995:557) suggests it has replaced the culture concept as the cornerstone of U.S. anthropology. It is also a popular, Western concern: feminism has problematised gender as "identity" and as we have noted, ethnic identity has become salient all over the world in a forceful new way. The concept has spread to such an extent that, as Gilroy notes, even commodities such as choice of car or clothing acquire the "additional burden" of being

"imagined to represent the truth of individual existence or the boundaries of communal sensibility". (1997:312)

The term has similar difficulties to those associated with "ethnicity", however: like many social science terms, it is somewhat unspecific, flexible, and context-sensitive and Banks (1996:134) suggests that its openness allows authors like Cohen (1982) to abandon it.

Why has "identity" become so popular? Eriksen suggests that part of the reason is a change in how it is conceptualised:

"that which was formerly considered private and fixed is now increasingly held to be public and negotiable" (1993:59-60)

and Banks (1996:134) quotes Ardener's view, that in its generality, "identity" provided something which "ethnicity" lacked. This changing definition suits a changing world according to Gilroy (1997:301, 307): "identity" provides a vocabulary appropriate for

"the geo-political dilemmas of the late-modern age".

My informants, thus, live in a context in which "identity" is something they are expected not only to have but to mould,

cherish and continuously present through whatever means are at hand. Whether one spends one's free time at the theatre or in the pub makes a statement about the kind of person one is; the people one chooses to spend time with also reveal one's "self" to the world. (Petronoti 1995:167) This is the gloss which is placed on quite ordinary activities, therefore, in our late modern age.

How, then, can we understand this concept? Eriksen's comments (above) assist us, as one of the agreed facets of identity in anthropology, perhaps the basis for requisitioning it from its original domain of psychology, is that identity is social. (Gilroy 1997:303, 315) Indeed, the concept can stretch from the individual actor to the collective, from personal identity to national (shared) identity. Cohen (1996) merges these two aspects in his concept of "personal nationalisms". (Herzfeld 1995; Gilroy 1997:302)

Other key definitional aspects include the concepts of sameness and difference, and of continuity from past to present and future. (Eriksen 1993:60; Gilroy 1997:303) An identity term may simultaneously signal membership within a category, and distinguish one member from another in that category. For example, in the category of "boys", "Seán" is one member, and "Séamus" is another. They share boyness, and therefore non-girlness, and at the same time they are contrasted in regard to each other. At one higher level of abstraction, the identity term "boys" works both to differentiate boys from girls, and boys from men, in one direction, and babies, in another. In Northern Ireland,

"Seán" and "Séamus" would also signal Catholic, and therefore non-Protestant, and outside Ireland, they would signal "Irish".

Identity is also deemed to persist over time. It is my identity that joins up the disparate experiences throughout my life, which provides the coherence by which I can continue to see myself as the same person over a 30 year period. (Cohen 1994:68; Rouse 1995:357; Jansen 1998:94; Hall 1990:225) However, as we are not normally individuals living in isolation from other social actors, we get some of our sense of inner coherence by being treated as persons who exist continuously, and who in spite of change, continue to be in an important sense, whole. Because other people continue to call me "Mary", to treat me as "Mary", and to have stable expectations of my Mary-ness, my inner sense of myself is continually reinforced.

Identity is sometimes portrayed as a possession. This can be allied with the primordial position, in which identity is an essence to be discovered. However, it has also been connected, by Rouse, (1995:357-8) with the idea that identity is achieved, negotiated, searched out. That is, identity as our possession is something we continually reinforce. (Wallman 1998:195; Fog Olwig 1998:225-6)

This approach finds its place in the de-essentializing discourse which emphasizes fluidity, contingency, creativity and multiple identities. (Gilroy 1997:303-4, 307-11; Hall 1990:223-226; Herzfeld 1997:31-2; Rapport and Dawson 1998) Kearney, (1995:558) for example, suggests a move from "either-

or" to "both-and-and" identities. Eriksen (1993:157) distinguishes between "digital" (either-or) identities, and "analogic" (or "somewhat") identities. (Rouse 1995:351, 354) This leads to the question of which identity is being emphasized in any particular context. When, for example, is an identity local or communal rather than ethnic, Jenkins asks. He suggests (1997:41) that one learns this through the consequences (or "virtualities") of the "nominal identification" (or classificatory name). Each identity thus entails its own rights, responsibilities, and access to resources.

As with ethnicity, the distinction between choice and ascription is a preoccupation of theorists. (Cohen 1994:50-1; Hall 1990:225-6; Scully 1994; Wallman 1984:15; Jenkins 1997:47; Eriksen 1993:41; Petronoti 1995:166, 181; Jansen 1998:107; Wallman 1998:184) This brings power relations clearly into the picture, and emphasizes identity's social nature. Jenkins, (1997:54) as noted above, suggests that it is in the meeting of internal and external definition that identity is created.

Identity is also, inevitably, a mixture of conscious and unconscious material. (Scully 1994:260-1; Cowan, cited in Cohen 1994:88-9) This has led to a borrowing from psychoanalysis and psychology, previously spurned by anthropologists. (Jenkins 1997:58; Gilroy 1997:304, 315; Rapport and Dawson 1998:22-23) One way of encapsulating this is in Bourdieu's concept of "habitus". Postone et al (1995:4) describe this as a "capacity for structured improvisation"; it



is also a "system of dispositions" that enables people to produce appropriate social activity. (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1995:37-38) This is affected by the individual history which is also embedded in the collective history of the group. In the notion of habitus, Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of the unexpressed background to all our actions and the extent to which embodiedness and practical mastery rather than articulacy characterise what we are doing. (Taylor 1995:50) Thus, actors pursue "symbolic capital", but do not always recognise that they are doing this.

Dreyfus and Rabinow (1995:41) note the problems with this: while the actors are seen to have practical mastery, they can be victims of "illusio", of mis/non-recognition of what they are doing. (Calhoun 1995:74-75) There are obvious difficulties with dismissing the actors' explanations but it is undeniable that what people say is not always the whole story. This may be because they are unconscious of certain motivations, or concealing them for self-presentational reasons. In this thesis, I try to reach behind what people say, through close and long-term observation, noting their inconsistencies and contexts.

Rouse and Borneman provide important caveats to the assumption of identity's primacy. Borneman, firstly, (1992:137) notes quite simply that his "Generation I" informants, talked about sex and relationships without relating these to a sense of identity. Rouse (1995:371) asserts that conceptualising "identity" as an individual possession owned equally by all was alien to his Mexican informants prior to their migration

to the U.S. Rather, their ideas of personhood entailed hierarchy and the notion of proper conduct according to position; they could, however, switch between both concepts in what he describes as "cultural bifocalism".

Rouse suggests that the discourse of identity is tied to hegemonic practices and that the current prominence of this discourse is a response to a crisis in hegemonic control. This would make academics unwitting agents of the ruling élite, much as they were once considered to be dupes of nationalist rhetoric. However, he does not propose abandoning the "identity" concept, but advocates that its relevance is investigated rather than assumed, through attention to historical and political context.

This thesis uses the concept of identity. This is because the term lends itself well to the concerns of my late-modern informants; it fits their reflective common sense usages, as well as social anthropological framework. My informants live in a world, as Gilroy notes, (1997:301) where identity matters. They have a conscious, ongoing concern to mould their identities to suit how, and who, they want to be. This is constricted by who they can be in the context where they find themselves and I thus accept Jenkins' view of the dialectical relationship between internal and external definition.

Identity is not only conscious, however and I wish to respect its unconscious aspect in this account: although this provides obvious evidence-gathering difficulties, its palpable relevance to identity means it cannot be ignored. I have not,

however, endeavoured to provide a comprehensive picture of the conscious or unconscious identities of my informants because that would have been an immense and open-ended task. I have, instead, focused on ethnic identities.

The debate on identity also leads to explorations of ideas on personhood and the self, the history of which is traced by Jenkins and Cohen. Significant contributors include Mead, who notes the distinction between 'I' and 'me'; (Jenkins 1997:57) Goffman, who proposes the performative self, with the individual firmly in charge of her own self-presentation; (1971; Jenkins 1997:59) Sartre, who conceptualises individuals as "solitary and totally free", the will "the essential centre of the self"; (Lukes 1977:26-7) and Lukes, (ibid:29) who favours individuals as agents choosing, under cultural constraints, from a myriad of ever-changing, but ultimately limited possibilities. Cohen, (1994) lastly, emphasizes creativity and self-consciousness.

Cohen (1994:14, 170-1) has, indeed, much to say on the individual, confronting the suggestion that this is a Western concept and arguing instead that the individual has sociological importance in all cultures. Taking the root "individual" he distinguishes three issues. (Ibid:168-180) "Individuality" is a property of selfhood, the perception of an individual's existential distinctiveness. Unlike "individualism", this is a neutral concept. It may not be synonymous with selfhood as it does not necessarily imply the consciousness of self which is the defining character of selfhood, but it is difficult, Cohen continues, to conceive of

self-consciousness which does not entail a sense of individuality.

"Individualism" as in methodological individualism, is an anti-Durkheimian, anti-collectivist social science position in which the actions of individuals are held to be as important as aggregates such as classes or parties. It is an approach to analysis in which the decision-making individual actor is given major prominence.

"Individualism" as a political creed is a third sense, most recently associated with Margaret Thatcher's administration. It places great emphasis on the individual as potential entrepreneur, as potentially resourceful and independent. Such individuals can be stifled by over-regulation, corporatism, or rendered dependent and passive by an indiscriminately provident welfare state. Cohen suggests that during the entrepreneurial revolution (associated with "Thatcherism"), the selfish self was invented at the expense of the self-conscious self.

Giving the self primacy in anthropological analysis does not, according to Cohen, mean the individual is prior to society; nor that the individual's behaviour is motivated by self-gratification. Rather, it implies that the behaviour of individuals is initiated by their conscious perceptions of themselves and their relationship to society. This is a point of view I support.

I wish to consider the relation of the individual to modernity and postmodernity at this point. The postmodern discourse in anthropology and other disciplines, is a "style which

emphasizes diversity", contingency and heterogeneity, replacing universalism with localism, seeing "grand narratives" (Smart 1991:23-4) and totalizing discourses as "essentially flawed", (Featherstone 1991:9) and deconstructing them into their individual and varied building blocks.

However, while this encourages a change of focus from a generalising theoretical perspective to a more particular one, it should not be taken to imply an interest in the individual, as the embodiment of the particular. In fact, the notion of "individual" is deconstructed by the postmodern critique into a conglomeration of role performances and social conditioning, without any central and unifying active will. This contrasts fundamentally with the attitude toward the self in modernity, where the will and integrity of the self as a "reflexive project" are emphasized: "we are .. what we make of ourselves", Giddens (1992:2, 75) suggests, stating explicitly that "the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences", but an autonomous entity.

This, in turn, contrasts with the pre-modern era, where envisaging the individual with "unique character and special potentialities" was "alien". (Ibid:74) Instead, lineage, gender and social status were all relatively fixed, and governed by institutionalised processes. It is ironic that the resultant passivity of pre-modernity is re-discovered in postmodernity; this is not, however, due to the impingement of external social constraints, but as a result of loss of confidence in ultimate values following secularisation and the loss of the transcendent matrix. (Seligman 1991:119)

What is the relevance of these debates to my informants? Postmodernism is an academic but also a popular debate. Newspaper articles such as "Teach Yourself Post-modernism" (15/11/92) help popularise these ideas. However, the defining values of modernity are more suited to my informants' self presentation and self understanding, and as such, influence this thesis more than postmodernism.

The way in which the emphasis on the self relates to the rhetoric of nationalism is dealt with by a number of writers, (Cohen 1994; 1996; Jansen 1998:96-9, 101; Gilroy 1997:302) who note that nationalism attempts to create a homology between the individual and the nation. Cohen, (1996) through his idea of personal nationalisms, sees the national as constructed by the individual and only convincing while relevant to local, individual concerns. Nation is, for him, a resource in expressing selfhood.

Herzfeld (1997:1, 5-6) also supports this emphasis on the individual, criticising Anderson for portraying nationalism/s as the imposition of an élite perspective, which ordinary people cannot influence. This, he continues, ignores the rueful self-recognition and embarrassment which are key markers of what he describes as "cultural intimacy", and crucial to any understanding of nationalism/s. He suggests that the challenge is to look behind images of national unanimity and see the creative and dissenting selves behind. These views provide timely reminders not to reify state forces or homogenize individuals.

I have chosen to emphasize the individuality of my informants.

I support Cohen's view of the self-conscious individual as the starting point for understanding the social. This individuality can, I suggest, be performative, creative, altruistic or selfish, depending on circumstances. While it is constrained by external factors, including culture and power differentials, the creative power of the individual to engage with these forces should not be under-estimated and I wish to highlight this creativity in the thesis.

Nonetheless, what my informants are conscious and aware of is, as I have indicated, only part of the story; thus, I look more widely to how they behave, and, following Bourdieu, to the histories and locations, or past and present contexts which affect their position; I also consider how their inconsistencies can reveal further information.

#### **THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF IRISH MIGRATION TO BRITAIN**

I shall begin this section by considering the changes within general theories on migration, and then move specifically to the Irish case, detailing the three main migration movements since 1846 and providing a profile of today's migrants.

Migration theories, like migration trends, are no more static than the migrants they cover. Early theories defined migration as "a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence", (Lee 1969:285) which involved overcoming the natural state of inertia. (Jackson 1969) Migration was seen as unusual and in need of explanation, for example through articulating migrant types, (Taylor 1969) and migrants were seen as responding to a "push-pull" framework. This stressed economic motivation, the pull of the city's bright lights and

economic advantages being reinforced by the push from joblessness or other economic disadvantage at home. Even in 1969, when such theories were still being articulated, challenge came. Migration began to be seen not as deviant, but more as a necessary element of normal population redistribution. (Beijer 1969)

Writing more recently, Rapport and Dawson, quoting Berger, describe migration as "'the quintessential experience' of the age". (1998:5) Noting that today's world is characterised by vastly increased movement and that migrants habitually move several times, (Amit-Talai 1998:45) they propose that movement is fundamental to modern identity. As they embrace both physical and cognitive movement in their definition, this affects both those undertaking it and also those who are aware of its predominance.

This freer movement, together with the constant innovations in communications technology, have resulted in processes of globalization and transnationalism and these are dealt with by numerous writers. The emergence of a new journal entitled "Diaspora: a Journal of Transnational Studies" in 1991 is another marker of the age. Diaspora is the perfect example of ethnicity not fixed to a single, inhabited location and Clifford, (1994) Gilroy, (1997) and Hall (1990) all investigate this. (See also Tölölyan 1996; Eriksen 1993; Kearney 1995; Rapport and Dawson 1998; Rouse 1995; Banks 1996.)

New terms have been created and old terms redefined to suit this modern context. Thus, epithets such as "cosmopolitan",



"transilient", "spiralist" have been created for migrants who move repeatedly as part of a self-conscious career strategy, (Eriksen 1993:150) and Rapport and Dawson (1998:7, 10) suggest that the concept of "home" needs redefined to be more mobile (in Rouse's term, "plurilocal"). Being at home for them entails inhabiting a cognitive environment in which one undertakes the routines of daily life. I return to this in Chapter 3.

This represents a radical change, from the perception of fixity as the norm, and migration as unusual to the emphasis on movement as relatively commonplace, and identities as readily conceptualised within it (although see Amit-Talai's caveat 1998:53).

Motivation for migration in this changing context remains a matter of debate. Economic motivation, originally considered paramount, is still emphasized by modern writers. While many migrants are strongly influenced by economic motives, my own material suggests that some migrants are more strongly influenced by non-economic concerns and I look at this in Chapter 4.

The final theoretical concern I wish to mention briefly is the question of what happens to the migrants' culture post-migration. Baumann and Sunier (1995:6) believe that "the very fact of migration reconstitutes culture". This is, I suggest, an empirical question and one which I shall consider in the thesis.

I shall now look specifically at the history of Irish<sup>2</sup> migration. In this section, I draw on the TIDE/AGIY report. (1988:7ff) Ireland has, it is suggested, contributed more than any other European country to population movement in the past 200 years, relative to its size. There have been three main waves: the first was 1846-7, during the Great Famine, when a quarter of the population emigrated. In fact, famine was endemic in Ireland in the second half of the 19th century, the Great Famine being exceptional only by virtue of its severity. Furthermore, Kirkham notes evidence of Irish migration as early as the 17th century, and in this sense, migration during the Great Famine itself marked, as Kirkham (1990:81) suggests, "a change in scale, not the advent of something new in Irish society". However, the scale was dramatic: a population of eight million was halved, two million people dying and two million emigrating. It is thus a very significant marker in the history of Irish migration.

Emigration 1820-1910 remained consistently high, with five million people leaving, 84% to America. Chain-linked emigration routes were established and the typical migrant, 1800-1850, was a young, single male aged 15-40. Post 1890s, women were slightly in the majority. Men were largely semi and unskilled casual labourers and sweated labourers, in declining trades. Women worked in textile factories, domestic service, or did laundry and piece-work. The middle-class

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term "Irish" as a shorthand in this thesis to denote migrants from North and Republic of Ireland. As I show later, my informants also proffer "Northern Irish" and "British" ethnic self-definitions.

element was disproportionately small, although Edwards and Storey (1985) draw attention to a significant group of Irish journalists and literati in Victorian Britain. (Scully 1994:97-8) Jackson (1963) suggests that this wave resulted in a demoralised country, with language and traditions decimated, and established a self-perpetuating cycle where emigration became characteristic of Irish society. A less negative alternative view is that emigration was used as a creative strategy to deal with great economic hardship.

The second wave followed "the Troubles" in Ireland, including the Easter Rising of 1916. In the 1930s, due to new American restrictions, this wave was mostly to Britain. Irish emigrants of the 1950s helped rebuild post-war Britain, men working as navvies, labourers, canal and railway constructors, and women in service and textile industries, nursing and doing heavy domestic work. The 1951 Census shows a doubling of Irish born since 1931 in England and Wales, although emigration to Scotland has declined since 1891. (See Appendix 1.)

The third wave of migration is the current one, in the 1980s-'90s. The 20th century reveals a progressive increase in migration from Ireland to S.E. England and London and elsewhere. (Ryan 1990:47; Courtney 1986:36-7) Metropolitan areas such as London and Manchester were favoured particularly by those emigrating from the Republic, whereas Northern Irish migrants tended to disperse throughout Britain, having closer links in particular with Scotland. (Bowcott 24/5/95a)

A number of sources proffer striking statistics on recent

Irish migration. (A.G.I.Y. 1/11/95; O'Sullivan 1/7/96; Kearney 1990:109) 40,000 are emigrating to London annually and the Irish community has become the largest ethnic group by migration in London, 9.6% of the total population including second generation. (Harris 23/3/95) Half of school leavers in the Republic planned to migrate in 1984, with only 5% definitely resolved to stay, (Courtney 1986:38) and in Northern Ireland in 1968, even before the recent wave, one-third of respondents claimed to have considered emigration. (Coward 1986:186) The extent of current migration is therefore clear.

Today's immigrant is often highly educated. Over 1/4 of graduates leave, including 1/2 of Ireland's vets and engineers and 3/4 of their architects, most to England. Indeed, the education levels of current Irish migrants exceed the British average. The 1991 Census shows 12.5% of white British people aged 18-29 with degree-level qualifications, compared to 24.9% of Irish-born British residents of the same age, rising to 32.5% for those from Northern Ireland. (Bowcott 24/5/95a) However, figures for those aged between 45 and retirement reveal the reverse. The current extent of highly educated and professional immigrants is therefore a new development.

Youth emigration, individual rather than chain-linked, has increased dramatically. Two-thirds of migrants from Northern Ireland were aged 20-44 in 1980-81 and 20,000 young people emigrate to London per annum. Again, this relates to characteristics of the population in Ireland, where the Republic has the largest increasing youth population in

Europe, the common adage being that "half the population is under 25". (U.S.I. News Jan. 1989; TIDE/AGIY 1988:9)

Female and Catholic rates of migration have traditionally been higher than male and Protestant, with female migrants comprising 53.4% of the Irish-born population in London in 1981 (Walter 1988:8-9; Lennon et al 1988:21; Scully 1994:78,81) and Catholic migration standing at 65% in 1951-71. However, Protestant rates rose in recession and in the 1970s, for the first time since partition, migration from Northern Ireland was higher than from the Republic. This was due partly to more Protestants in Northern Ireland attending British universities, but may also relate to Protestant alienation in Northern Ireland. (McGill 22/2/94; O'Toole 1/12/93)

Today's migrants have arrived from a newly urbanised background, with a more international ethos. This obviously affects the migrant's adaptation: Krausz (1971) notes the importance of "urbanism", that is, the possession of certain skills and attitudes requisite for adaptation to and survival in an urban-industrial society.

Attitudes and values have also changed. While 1950s migrants stressed self-reliance and personal responsibility, 1980s emigrants regard failure, unemployment and low self-image as more likely to be caused by public prejudice and injustice rather than by personal misfortune. They are conscious of their rights, and value self-development "only as part of environmental, social, political and economic justice". (TIDE/AGIY 1988:18) Having experienced a more affluent

Ireland, they have higher expectations.

These migrants are also more visible and confident than in earlier migratory phases:

"a remarkable surge in cultural self-confidence is taking place",

according to O'Sullivan. (1/7/96) He points to fashionable London Irish restaurants, venues for celtic drama, Irish cultural shows such as Riverdance, Eurovision and Irish football success. The plethora of clubs and associations celebrating Irishness also emphasize this change.

What are common attitudes to emigration within Ireland? On the one hand, it is popularly lamented as a "brain drain", on the other, it is tolerated and indeed encouraged in government for economic reasons. Ryan (1990:45) suggests that, as an economic safety valve, it is "at the centre of the Irish experience of being modern", enabling the transition from traditional rural society to modern industrial society, and a modern way of life for those remaining.

Individuals and pressure groups in the 1980s and '90s have, indeed, accused government ministers in the Republic of relying on emigration to lower unemployment figures and prop up the economy. Brian Lenihan, Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) and Minister for Foreign Affairs famously defended emigration to "Newsweek" in October 1987, by suggesting it led to improved skills for migrants, who could "develop a work ethic" and apply it to Ireland on return: "after all", he continued, "we can't all live on a small island". (Lee 1990: 36) This, in contrast to Ireland's status as the most sparsely populated country in the European Community, became

the most celebrated comment of the 1980s on emigration.  
(Scully 1994:94-7)

In Northern Ireland, a similar situation pertains and Gudgin (6/10/94) suggests that the economy depends on "large-scale government subvention and emigration into the labour markets of Britain".

Relating this to migrant motivation, the media variously report the economic situation both as an incentive to leave and an incentive to stay. Some newspaper articles draw attention to the possibility of higher standards of living in N. Ireland due to lower house prices and cheaper luxury items, (MacKinnon 8/8/93) but the majority emphasize the gap in earnings between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and the relative disadvantage of the former. ("Poverty gap is growing" 7/1/89; Huhne 17/12/88) I have, however, heard Irish people express both points of view to me. The economic situation can thus be cited as a reason either to stay or go, depending on which point of view one wishes to justify.

At State level, some ambivalence towards the value of emigration is shown. The 1954 official "Commission on Emigration Report" (Ryan 1990:66) suggested a range of positive and negative effects; negative features included reduced population and increased burden of the aged; weakened national pride and confidence; and the tendency of some migrants to succumb to "the temptations of city life"; on the positive side, it noted that emigration has given Ireland a disproportionate significance abroad; provided a higher standard of living for those remaining; and contributed to the

diffusion of Christianity abroad.<sup>3</sup>

I shall now reflect on today's migrants in terms of the dilemma they face between being Irish and expressing their individual autonomy. I will also consider how the act of migration contributes to this dilemma.

#### **IRISH MIGRANTS: FROM DESTITUTION TO SELF-FULFILMENT**

Irish migrants in my study are usually in a very different situation from most of those who preceded them. No longer are they emigrating to escape the destitution of famine or even economic recession. Many of today's migrants are, I suggest, emigrating in order to pursue an agenda of self-development and fulfilment. In this, they find their place within the current academic and popular preoccupation with identity, and a conscious preoccupation with this is evidenced in my informants' words and consolidated in their actions.

This expresses itself partly in my informants' emphasis on their individuality. The statement held most in common by my informants was that each felt him/herself to be unusual, "an oddball", and thus unhelpful to my research. This self-designation would occur when I explained my research purposes. My informants thus emphasized their individuality in a way which contrasted it with their ethnic heritage: in the context of Irish society, they saw themselves as individuals who were somehow different. This was represented in a self-effacing

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<sup>3</sup> Immigration has also risen in Ireland. 69,000 people from G.B. and 21,000 from elsewhere emigrated to the Republic in the 1970s. (Coward 1986:186-8) Asylum-seekers have also increased since my fieldwork: 2,000 applications in the first half of 1997 compared to 424 in 1995. (Daniels 29/7/97)



rather than boastful way. Given that so many of my informants proffered this view, I felt it was important to look more deeply at it.

Initially, I was struck by the richness of my informants' individuality, and by the variation in their views and in how they lived their lives. Even within a group limited by ethnicity, class, age and period of migration, the variation was striking. I considered writing a postmodernist account at this point, emphasizing diversity and uniqueness, rather than features shared by sociological category. Over time, however, I became aware of certain similarities in terms of religion, geographic origin (North/Republic, urban/rural) and gender, as well as attitudes which were shared across these boundaries, not least the one quoted above. I therefore began to ask what purpose this stress on individuality had for my informants.

To understand this, it is important to consider the country which produced my informants. Ireland, it became clear, was experienced and remembered by my informants as a place where one was strongly expected to conform to one's religious and local community norms. I look at these representations in detail in Chapter 3. This was also my own experience, as a migrant from Northern Ireland. Strong community and familial bonds were, furthermore, emphasized in the literature on Ireland.

The environment my informants had left was thus one where individuality and difference were discouraged and this was part of the ethnic heritage they remembered and brought with them to London. In emphasizing their individuality to me,

they were thus demonstrating the re-evaluation of this heritage in their new setting, or indeed its rejection, as to be an individual and yet to be Irish provided my informants with a potential dilemma.

If individuality had been discouraged in the "home" country, how was it received in London? In London there is much more scope for emphasizing one's claims to individuality. Hannerz (1980:249) notes the fluidity of identification and affiliation, the increased degree of choice, the onus on individual decision making and the absence of corporate group membership which are characteristic of the urban situation. It is, he suggests,

"through.. the presentation of self that city dwellers often make their escape from anonymity and segmentality in social relations". (Ibid:241)

Thus, the city is a place where the importance of the self is highlighted: the possibilities for self-construction where one is not generally known and where there are fewer expectations of one's behaviour, are greater.

Some of my informants had migrated from Irish cities, but in terms of size alone, London is on a different scale: the population of Belfast is 287,100 (Beaumont 28/8/94) (certainly small enough to limit anonymity), and Dublin, 1,021,449, (1996 figure, Irish Embassy, London) compared to Greater London's 7,007,100 (mid-1995, Office for National Statistics, London).

Secondly, much of London has a strikingly cosmopolitan, multi-cultural atmosphere, in which many cultures and different ways of living co-exist. Ireland, by comparison, has a much more

homogenous population, particularly in rural areas. While cosmopolitanism in urban areas of the Republic is developing with increasing immigration, this is not as established and confident as in London.

The prevalence of Margaret Thatcher's ideas during my fieldwork is also relevant: while these would have been familiar in Northern Ireland (more than the Republic), their impact was diluted by the strong ties of loyalty to family and religious community which I have mentioned.

The culture of psychotherapy (much emphasized in Giddens (1992:143, 179-80) as characteristic of the modern age), was also much more prevalent than in Ireland. A number of my informants had personal experience of psychotherapy and other alluded to its influence.<sup>4</sup> For a range of reasons, therefore, in London individual autonomy was something which was much easier to grasp, or to imagine for my informants.

The relationship between this notion of individual autonomy and distinctiveness and the pull of the ethnic or local community group, emphasizing belonging and sameness, began to seem central in the research. With regard to both, one can usefully speak of imagining, both being important representations or idealisations. The way in which my informants attempted to resolve this contradiction is thus an

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<sup>4</sup> Figures from the British Association for Counselling (Information Office) register 100 members in Northern Ireland, compared to 14,008 in Britain as a whole and 1,400 registered with the Irish Association for Counselling and Therapy in the Republic. Even given the comparative population differences, this is a huge difference. Again, in Palmer 1997, 8 individual practitioners are listed for N.I., compared to 102 for S.E. London alone.

important theme in the thesis.

What was the role of migration itself in resolving this dilemma? In one sense, the dilemma pre-dated the migration experience for my informants, and in another, migration brought it to the fore. Migration would seem to be a clearly individual act. I shall now look more closely at its meaning to see if this is correct.

Giddens suggests that each individual life has a number of "fateful moments", which he describes as

"transition points which have major implications not just for the circumstances of an individual's future conduct, but for self-identity". (1992:143)

The decision to migrate was just such a fateful moment for my informants. Many of today's migrants are well educated, with the resources to make successful choices either in Ireland or outside it. Many choose to leave, as I have indicated, as part of a programme of self-development, partly because it is expected and partly to improve their lives and discover more about themselves and about the world. This positive depiction is also one Wickramagamage (1992:172-3) chooses to emphasize, focusing on migration as a "second chance", enabling transformation and new narratives of the self.

Migration is no longer for life, but part of a journey which can take the migrant on to other countries, or back to Ireland. (Bowcott 24/5/95b; Scully 1994:82) This emphasizes migration as an individual movement. It is, however, more than this. In Anderson's (1991:53-4) terms, the journey is a meaning-creating phenomenon, the meaning relating fundamentally to the community from which it issues.

For my informants, the relation between the meaning of migration and that of ethnicity is an interesting one. Scully (1994:2) also emphasizes the value of inter-relating these discourses. In the way that migration is an economic crutch for governments and is established as a norm in Irish society, so the decision to migrate becomes something which is very much rooted in that community, even though, paradoxically, it concerns leaving it. Thus, Eagleton, writing about Ireland, suggests that,

"Few activities were more native to the culture than getting out of it". (Cited in Burke 2/6/95)

Migration is thus a mixture of individual autonomy and communal norm and as such the dilemma my informants face is encapsulated within it. It does, however, open up new possibilities in the new country, and what my informants chose to do with this freedom forms the content of the thesis.

Self-definition is clearly a challenging process. For my informants, it involved an investigation of their ethnic heritage and an assessment of its relevance to the self they recognised or aspired to. While self-consciousness is in some ways as old as society, its current evocation and emphasis lend it a quality which is peculiarly modern. As such, my informants were typical of the concerns of their time. While the issues they struggled with in understanding their ethnic heritage were shared, the ways in which they pursued their journeys were ultimately unique.

In the next chapter, I will consider fieldwork methodology in the urban environment and my own position in the field. After this, the sequence of my chapters demonstrates a desire to

describe my informants' journeys in the order in which they unfolded. So, Chapter 3 is on Ireland, where they began. This is not intended to be a comprehensive history and socio-political analysis of Ireland, but rather to highlight Ireland as it was remembered and imagined by my informants. Chapter 4 focuses on my informants' arrival in London, their expectations, preparations, and initial experiences. Chapter 5 considers what they did with their leisure time, once they had settled in. In analyzing their socialising, it is possible to see to what extent this is influenced by a sense of needing to be in touch with other Irish/Northern Irish people; my informants' actions are thus brought into the identity picture. Chapter 6 provides case studies of three Irish organisations.

Chapter 7 presents my informants' representations of their ethnicity. Being Irish in Ireland is different to being Irish in England and my informants had all had time to experience the latter by the time I talked to them. This chapter is deliberately placed after they had arrived, settled in, created a social life and had a chance to reflect, all these things having a bearing. Chapter 8 begins with the topic of integration and then reflects on the utility of "ethnicity" as an explanatory term, considering the overall value and meaning it had for my informants. Chapters 9 and 10 consider the twin issues of religion and politics, as it seemed that these aspects of my informants' lives and identities deserved consideration on their own. In Chapter 11, I conclude, presenting what my overall findings indicate to me.

The picture I will present in this thesis is of a set of migrants who wished to remain selectively connected with their Irish ethnicity. While they valued their ethnicity, they also experienced its demerits. The exact configurations of these positive and negative responses varied, as did the ways in which they understood "Irishness".

My informants were also, however, very concerned to discover and express their individuality, and this desire could conflict with the communal values and expectations of their ethnic group. This conflict led to many contradictory responses to their ethnicity, and I will highlight these throughout the thesis.

Ethnic identity was, I suggest, an integral part of my informants' identities, and had some power over them, both through its emotional content, and its presence in the unexamined attitudes which resulted from early socialisation. However, my informants also interacted with and manipulated ethnic identity in a way that was consistent with the process by which identity in general is constructed in late modernity.

## CHAPTER 2

### URBAN RESEARCH

Anthropology, originally carried out in small-scale, geographically bounded communities, has been challenged to adapt its methodological tools and its self-definition by the world's increasing urbanisation and by the growing interest in studying complex societies and urban settings. In this chapter, I wish to consider my fieldwork, which is, self-evidently, in an urban setting. I shall begin by giving a detailed account of the sociological facts of fieldwork; I will then discuss it in the context of some general theoretical issues relating to the urban environment; and I will finish by focusing on two specific research methods, participant observation and the formal interview. I will argue that participant observation remains valuable in an adapted sense in the urban setting, and was central to my own research methods.

#### **MY FIELDWORK**

Fieldwork took place intensively between 1989 - 1990, and less intensively (that is, alongside other activities), lasted from 1987 - 1991. My informants, as I indicate above, numbered about 50. Just over half of my informants were women, which reflects the numbers in which the sexes migrate, as I note in Chapter 1. Again, over half were from the (larger) Republic, the remainder from the North. All informants were middle-class. One can use many different indicators of class,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some examples: the Hall-Jones scale (which uses prestige-based categories); NORC of Duncan Socio-Economic index (a prestige-based score applied by a formula of a job's



emphasizing either parental or individual occupation, education, wealth, prestige, residential area, self-ascription or a mixture of these. I have assessed my informants according to education, occupation and self-ascription. Occupation was the most important, as although some had university-level education, others had finished education at school level, achieving varying exam results. All were in occupations ranging from professional to skilled manual. All except one considered themselves middle-class, and this one, having been educated to Masters level and working as a journalist, I still considered to fit my criteria.<sup>2</sup>

I had closest links with around twelve core informants (six women, six men), on whom I provide detailed information in Appendix 2. I also observed and had valuable conversations with a larger number of people, who contributed to the overall picture.

The distinction between core informants and others was not necessarily in terms of frequency of meetings, but rather, related to the breadth and depth of information which I received. With core informants, I acquired more wide-ranging and in-depth information, which covered a number of areas in

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average education plus income); Irish occupational Index (a prestige based score developed from looking at over 1,000 occupations); and the Hope-Goldethorpe Scale (looking at conceptual categories).

<sup>2</sup> She seemed to base her own identification as working-class on her need for a scholarship to fund her through university, that is, on her origins rather than her attainments. There was also an ideological element: I suspect she preferred the idea of being working class as I witnessed a distaste for what she saw as the fripperies of middle-class existence. See Chapter 5.

their lives. While this was most easily obtained by regular meetings over a long period of time, and this frequently applied, for a few, as I note in Appendix 2, these meetings were less frequent, yet the quality and comprehensiveness of information justified their designation as core informants. The frequency with which I met my other informants also varied, from one-off meetings, to regular contact over the period of a year or so.

The information received from these other informants was less comprehensive for two reasons. One was that I had not had sufficient one-to-one meetings with them to obtain a fuller picture. As there was a limit to how many people I could see regularly, this was partly a result of practicalities. It also related to my fieldwork methods. I did not wish, in the main, to direct my informants or structure encounters with them, in an attempt to find out what topics they raised without my intervention, and this meant that it often took time to discover wider aspects of their lives (although this was not inevitable, as I have indicated).

Secondly, although I might see some informants weekly for up to a year, this was in a group setting, such as the Irish Studies and Irish Language classes which I attended. In these group settings, where I observed, listened and interacted on a regular basis, there were many rich and interesting discussions about various aspects of being Irish in London. I absorbed this information gratefully, and considered it of value even though it was not anchored in the same in-depth knowledge of the rest of these individuals' lives as was the

case with core informants.

Thus, my conversations about what it meant to be Irish were carried out with people whose marital status or occupation, for instance, might not be known to me. Such information remained illuminating in its own right, even though I was unable to contextualise every conversation of this kind in a full knowledge of my informants' networks. It was also helpful in that it gave me a broader context in which to assess the wider relevance of information provided by core informants.

While the numbers of informants for whom I have fuller information, as indeed, the numbers of my wider group, are small, as Wallman (1984:vii) notes, a selection that is not statistically significant, nor yet a sample in any accepted sense, need not necessarily be atypical; case studies, furthermore, can illustrate aspects of social process and demonstrate certain theoretical principles.

How did I meet my informants? I encountered them through a variety of means. I began with personal contacts of my own, from N. Ireland and also from a year's temporary work in a variety of office locations in London prior to commencing my research. I also gathered informants in Irish centres and venues, but was careful not to make this my main source, as this would have skewed my findings in favour of those who chose to emphasize their Irish heritage. I lived in Kilburn during the fieldwork period, which I expected to produce informants; however, one of my findings was that the young middle-class avoided living in Kilburn, although some would

consider socialising there, so this did not generate the informants I had expected.

Lastly, and most importantly, as my research interests became known, informants and non-Irish friends and contacts in other areas of my life passed on Irish contacts to me. Network side effects of all the above led to ever increasing openings, as the more people I met, Irish and non-Irish, the more they suggested others to me. This was what Scully (1994:350) describes as the "snowballing" method; as she notes, it depends for its efficacy on other people's assistance. The reason for choosing this way of working was partly serendipitous: before I had even decided to "snowball", informants were, simply, cascading my way, and I gratefully took advantage of this. For the period of my fieldwork, in short, I was sensitive to meeting Irish people in every area of my life, whether in official research mode or in my own leisure time, and meet them I did.

The informants I encountered through individual networks tended to have no connections with other informants, with two significant exceptions. I knew Paul, a core informant, from Northern Ireland. As I had also known three of his friends in Northern Ireland, they too became informants in London. Furthermore, Paul's fiancée became a core informant. Secondly, I was in contact with eight members of a family of twelve (the O'Connells). Of this family, one (Colm) was a core informant, I had individual meetings with three others, and the rest I observed in family gatherings. (See Appendix 2.) Those informants whom I met in group settings, for

example, Irish language or Irish Studies classes, clearly mixed with other Irish people in these groups, although they did not usually meet group members in individual settings.

My fieldwork strategy responded to how my informants wished to conduct themselves in the city: I joined them where they were and where I was invited. This was mainly in public leisure environments, although I visited the homes of core informants and was occasionally invited to work environments. My informants did not wish their connection with me to be dutiful, but fun, as they were in London partly to have fun, and one of the advantages of this research strategy for all concerned was that it was indeed enjoyable. This, of course, led to my informants being keen to see me and more able to open up, which was obviously advantageous for the progression of the fieldwork. The limitations of this research method also relate to the nature of the network, in that I did not witness my informants in a full variety of contexts and thus often had to rely on reported information to obtain a fuller picture of their lives.

What information was I trying to obtain? Generally, I wished to know what it meant for my informants to be Irish migrants in Britain. I was interested in the way they thought about their lives, focusing on the issue of identities, specifically ethnic identities. I was also interested in what they chose to do with their time. One way in which the force of the ethnic identity could be judged was through the time spent with ethnic companions and in ethnic venues. It is worth

recording Wallman's caveat (1984:62-5) at this point, that the simple choice of ethnic companion should not lead us to hasty conclusions. In her notion of affective network, what one feels about one's linkages is as vital as the link itself. What one thinks about them is also vital: to choose for or against a compatriot as companion may be for reasons irrelevant to their ethnicity and is also contextual: someone who is a resource for some purposes can be a liability in others. Further discussion about my informants' choices and actions was therefore essential to uncover their meaning.

I endeavoured to supplement verbal accounts with diaries, but found that my informants were less willing to fill these out than to socialise. While I asked most of my core informants to fill out activity diaries for three weeks, only three responded and of these, two were dictated retrospectively to me rather than written as the events occurred. The information included the minutiae of everyday life, like shopping, decorating, swimming, "chores" as well as contacts with Irish and non-Irish people, information I had requested. Afterwards, we discussed the diaries informally, and I asked if they were typical and how people felt about the items within.

The only surprise the diaries contained was that one woman, who lamented her lack of social life to me, clearly had a very active social life, and I realised that what this statement meant was that she did not have sufficient contacts with men: finding a partner was a priority for her and socialising was

a means to this end. Other, smaller insights issued from the range of items that could be perceived to contain identity statements by my informants, for example, what one watched on television, how often one telephoned "home" (and if Ireland remained "home"), conversations held about Ireland with non-Irish people. What was interesting was that these items were noted by my informants.

While diaries could have been a fruitful avenue, (as time charts were for Wallman, (1984:49, 51-2, 58) although these too were not without their problems) this was somewhat sabotaged by my informants' unwillingness to fill them in. The extent to which they were willing to talk to me did compensate for this, and I believe illustrates something of the attitude they had in wishing to enjoy their position as informants, rather than work at it, as a duty, in already busy lives. I was loath to turn their involvement into a chore myself, and after some cajoling, abandoned the diary enterprise. I shall now consider my fieldwork in relation to some general theoretical issues.

#### **ISSUES IN URBAN RESEARCH AND THEIR RELATION TO FIELDWORK**

The first issue I wish to consider is the extent to which the urban environment is characterised by un-knownness, and the implications of this for social relations. Wirth (cited in Hannerz 1980:62) stressed the anonymity and impersonality of the city; this led, he suggested, to relations which were normatively "impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental". This picture is in stark contrast to the bounded, rural villages of early anthropology, where everyone was known

both to each other and, to a lesser extent, to the anthropologist.

However, other writers focused on the way in which the unknown was overcome. Thus, some emphasized the existence of "urban villages", by which the city was dissected into manageable sections, and kinship, which continued to be valuable in the urban situation. (Lewis 1951; Hauser & Schnore 1965; Gans 1962) More recently, Hannerz (1980) suggested that "role-discriminatory attributes", or the recognition of common ethnicity, class or gender, helped to limit the uncertainty which resulted from the unknownness of the urban environment by recruiting people into recognisable roles.

Hannerz also proposed that role collections could be divided into five domains: household and kinship, provisioning, recreation, neighbouring, and traffic, with only traffic and provisioning partly corresponding to Wirth's notion of impersonality. Continuing to broaden the focus from the binary division between known and unknown, Hannerz suggested that there were four broad types of urban lives: "encapsulation" (urban villages), "segregativity" (having several distinct sets of relationships), "integrativity" (where these sets of relationships were brought together) and solitude (usually transitional).

In terms of the types of urban lives which Hannerz identifies, my informants did not choose "encapsulation", often rejecting it forcefully, but were mostly located within "segregativity", where they kept separate or experienced as separate their connections with different people. This was considered by



some to be a consequence of living in a large city, where people's lives were separated by distance and also by habit. Some degree of "integrativity" did occur, however, which I consider later: socialising with work colleagues, or bringing friends to an Irish centre to meet others, for example. The solitude which can characterise the beginning of migration, especially for people migrating alone (which most of my informants did), was experienced as loneliness by many of my informants, and they gratefully left it behind.

My fieldwork, as may already be clear, singles out one of Hannerz' domains as its focus, namely that of recreation. In terms of his other four domains, although I was invited to core informants' homes, I did not, unlike Wallman, (1982; 1984) choose to focus on households themselves, but mainly met my informants in their leisure time at social venues across London. This relates to my group of informants who were young, single and keen to socialise away from home; they had not, in the main, established permanent households in London, but were often living in transitory rented accommodation.

Kinship information was often confined to verbal reports, as most informants had left their families behind in Ireland and not established a family of their own in London. There were exceptions to this, most notably the O'Connell family. Some other informants also had family members in London, but these seemed less of a resource than the O'Connells were for each other. This was not the kind of fieldwork where I was habitually invited to weddings, funerals and christenings, that is, to institutional family events, but rather to bars,

restaurants and the cinema. Occasionally I was introduced to visiting family, but this was rare. My experiences of provisioning and traffic with informants were of minimal import and my informants did not usually know their neighbours, nor was a more generalized sense of neighbouring particularly prominent. This was something they tended to comment on, and regret, as typical of the city.

Lest focusing on recreation appear trivial, let me stress that it subsumes issues powerfully experienced by my informants in a non-work context: in particular, it covers the domain of relationships, including friendship, as well as, of course, what my informants chose to do with their free time. It is an area which is less constrained and imposed than workplace relations and thus allowed for more free choice.

Through the material I obtained in this context, I was able to reflect on the issue of identity for my informants, and in particular, what, if anything, their ethnic identity meant to them. The way my informants chose to spend their leisure time provided information about the persons they imagined themselves to be and the ways in which they wished to present themselves. Through its very specificity, this particular window onto identity provided rich and concentrated material.

Another way of tackling the contrast between known and unknown is by putting the individual self at the centre of the account. Network analysis is a well-known way in which this has been done; here the social world is portrayed as a web of relationships between individuals, traced outwards from ego.

Wallman (1984:59-62; 1982:192) offers some useful modifications to this, and also notes the constraints on mapping relationships in the city. I have not chosen to make an individual's web of relationships my central focus here.

A second way of focusing on how the individual relates to the profusion of diverse others in the city is through the "contrast model", which suggests that people use this experience of diversity to fashion their senses of self. Certainly my informants were encouraged to re-evaluate their ideas and attitudes through meeting people with differing approaches to life in London.

Raban (cited in Hannerz 1980:249) prefers to emphasize the inter-relation between individuals and the city itself, treating the city as an actor in its own right; he suggests that individuals imprint their identity on the city, but are also affected by its resistance. Wallman too (1984:211) stresses the limitations which the "capability" of an environment places on individuals.

This issue was commented upon by some informants, who highlighted changes necessitated by their new context. For example, modes of socialising were affected, as "dropping-in" on friends was perceived as no longer possible due to the large distances involved. I also noticed that socialising tended to start and finish much earlier in London, due to the constraints of public transport. The extent to which the environment was perceived as constraining varied, as some individuals appeared comparatively un-affected by it, or else

saw it in a positive, enabling light.

The alienation perspective, lastly, suggests that "soulless" pursuits in the city lead to deprivation and a disjunction between self and role, or public/private selves, with other relationships pursued to achieve self-expression. This, of course, recalls Weber and Marx's analyses of modern industrial life and its consequent anomie/alienation. A few of my informants were very dissatisfied with their jobs, for example Breda, and Martin when he first obtained work (see Chapter 4). The options for them were changing jobs and pursuing other avenues of support and fulfilment. Others felt that commuting among crowds of un-communicative strangers was soulless and alienating.

In general, my informants often stressed the importance of friendships and other relationships to counter loneliness and isolation and help them to feel "at home". This recalls Rapport and Dawson's (1998) volume analyzing what it is to feel "at home" in an age of movement. Connections with like-minded individuals helped to create this sense of being "at home" for my informants, and in Hannerz' terms, limited uncertainty.

A second general issue and preoccupation of theorists in the context of the expansion of fieldwork settings is the distinction between fieldwork overseas or "at home". This has resulted partly from the training of greater numbers of indigenous people as anthropologists, who then turn their attention to their own society. Baumann, in an unpublished article, suggests that this distinction is spurious and

instead distinguishes two types of fieldworker, depending on whether they familiarise the strange or defamiliarise the known. Scully, (1994:323) collapsing even this distinction, suggests that,

"the confrontation of the self with the other is always fundamental",

whether in an "exotic" or familiar setting. (Jenkins 1997:4)

Indeed, Gilroy (1997:315) suggests that insights from psychotherapy and psychology show us that "the other" can be encountered in a fundamental way within oneself. These are useful insights.

In my own case, I was, like my informants, a young, middle-class Irish migrant in London. I regarded this as both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the positive front, I felt I had an insight into their situation and a "head start". However, I felt that this applied specifically to Northern Irish informants. I believed I had a reasonable insight into Northern Irish Catholics, having socialised in "mixed" company while I lived in Northern Ireland and having had a Catholic partner for six years. Due to this, I felt firmly disabused of the misapprehensions about Catholics which resulted from my Protestant upbringing. I considered, however, that my understanding did not extend to migrants from the Republic. In this I am like my informants, who felt a large gap between North and Republic, as I will relate, as if the two peoples were quite separate.

A problem with researching my "own" society was, as Agar (1980) notes, the difficulty of judging significant behaviour when surrounded by the familiar. It was thus vital to

recognise the desensitising effects of familiarity. For example, I learned not to assume that someone proffering the same view as myself shared the same reasons for holding it. In this and in other ways, I learned not to make unwarranted assumptions. For example, one informant told me she felt guilty because she was not particularly friendly with a colleague. I initially thought it was because the colleague was, like her, from Northern Ireland; in fact it was because she was a fellow Christian. This recalls Wallman's caveat (page 56).

Secondly, distancing and detachment were perhaps harder for me than for an outsider. Part of the difficulty here is that the anthropologist "at home" has three simultaneous, potentially conflicting reference groups: "own", fieldwork and professional societies. (Agar 1980:54) My informants had expectations of me in terms of friendship, which involved transparency, openness and informality, especially as they tended to forget that I was researching. I found that this jarred with my attempts to operate according to the codes of my professional group.

I felt more anomalous, furthermore, by virtue of the expectation that I would be, in an important sense, the same as my informants. The tension between the intimacy of friendship and the distance required by researching was one I found difficult, and which caused a split with one informant, who found my continued research role upsetting after we became friendly. It was thus potentially problematic for informants as well as for myself. (Scully 1994:323) Expectations of me

as friend rather than researcher were thus confusing to me and to my informants, but expectations of me as researcher were also striking, in that I encountered the assumption that I should produce a tape recorder or notebook, and if I did not, I was not 'doing it properly'. As one's perceived role affects the data, (Agar 1980:41) this was more than a question of personal discomfort.

A third and related general issue is that of anthropological objectivity. While earlier writing promoted the idea of the objective anthropologist, who observed and recorded without affecting the data, in today's reflexive anthropological world, this view has been discredited. Thus, an explanation of how the anthropologist affects the data is considered an important part of modern research.

Feminist researchers have helped lead the way on this issue, and Scully (1994:322-339) refers us to a number of these. Following Portes, she notes that the final outcome of research does not depend on the researcher's technical skill, but rather on the interaction between the researcher's plans and presence and the reactions of one's informants to these. Fieldwork is, Scully continues, an essentially interactive process between the research, the respondents and the settings. (Aretxaga 1997:21-3,26)

Finch (1984:79) suggests that the only morally defensible way for a feminist to interview a woman is via a

"non-hierarchical relationship in which she is prepared to invest some of her own identity".

She refers to Oakley (1981) as having exposed the 'unbiased' style of interviewing "for the sham it always was". This

encompasses ethics (aiming for reciprocity rather than unequal power) and efficacy (bringing improved results). Given the inevitable involvement of the researcher, Kleinman proposes that she make allowances for her emotional responses; otherwise, she suggests, these will shape the research process in uncomprehended ways. (Scully 1994:335)

Going beyond the perspective of feminism, Borneman, (1992:12) quoting Hayden White, suggests that we are "emplotted... by our natives", in other words, that they identify us by our cultural and historical contexts, whether we like it or not. Bourdieu expresses this, characteristically, in terms of each researcher inevitably bringing a personal habitus to the situation. It is only by being explicit about one's own position in the academic field, Bourdieu believes, that "true knowledge" may be possible. (Lipuma 1995:21)

The upshot of all these relativities is to make anthropological research much more of an interpretive art than an exact science. In keeping with these insights, I shall now consider the emotional facts of my fieldwork, what I brought to the situation and how I inter-related with informants.

I began my fieldwork in some trepidation. I anticipated, fearfully, that my informants would resent intrusive questions and send me away, having gained nothing at all, not even the sense of what it was I wanted to find. I felt extremely aware of my own position as a Northern Irish Protestant and anxious about how this would be received.

What happened was that I was welcomed in a way I found surprising and moving. I discovered that people were very



interested in my research and very glad to have a chance to talk in detail about their experiences in London. It seemed that this opportunity to talk was often a new experience for my informants, as no-one had asked before about these issues and experiences. Consequently, I was sometimes informed that I was making my informants think about things they had not considered before. This demonstrates cogently the inter-relation of informants and researcher in producing my account: my input inevitably shaped the responses and prompted new ways of thinking.

My origins were clearly important to my informants. To state these clearly, I was born in a small town in Northern Ireland and lived there for 18 years. I moved to Scotland for four years and thence to London in 1988. My religious background is Protestant and in terms of ethnic identity, I considered myself Northern Irish or Irish.

However, as with my informants, it was "not as simple as that". (McFarlane 1986) I had been perturbed to be identified as Irish when I first emigrated, not seeing my ethnic identity as primary in the way that others seemed to. Over the years and especially during fieldwork, I did much thinking about my own ethnic identity, and my feelings on it changed. Having from an early age rejected the traditional Protestant identification with Britishness, I used "Northern Irish" and "Irish" labels situationally. While I felt that "Northern Irish" was most accurate, I also felt uncomfortable about using this identification, as it seemed too close to the typical Protestant rejection of Irishness as Catholic,

inferior and "other". Through the course of my fieldwork, encountering many Catholics from Northern Ireland who identified themselves in London primarily as Northern Irish, I became more comfortable with this self-identification as I felt it could be separated from sectarian division.

How were my origins perceived? Firstly, I tended not to share these with informants until a relationship had been established, as I was concerned how disclosure would affect the information I received: would the person feel uncomfortable about giving an alternative view, refuse to talk to me, or give me partial information? In retrospect, this probably reflects my own anxiety both about imposing my views and also about being rejected, in particular by Catholics. This illustrates how an upbringing in Northern Ireland predisposes one to be wary about religious disclosure.

However, holding back my own position also had useful research implications. I wanted to see how important my religion was to the person who enquired: could they drop it, or was it crucial that they place me before they opened up? Would they play games to try to find out, repeat the question directly, or simply withhold information until I told them? Similarly, I wanted to see if the person's attitude to me changed after the information was given, and in what way. This helped me understand to what extent Northern Irish religious divisions had been transposed to London.

I found that some people asked me directly, usually prefacing the question by a comment such as "I know it doesn't matter over here, but..". Others could be seen to test me by

watching my reactions to their statements, asking more indirect questions and so on. In Northern Ireland, there are many ways to discover a person's religious affiliation and this knowledge forms an integral part of informal education in Northern Ireland. School attendance is one possibility, a saint's name indicating a Catholic school; pronunciation of the letter 'h', as in "H-blocks", is another, Protestant and Catholic communities favouring distinct pronunciations; some people hold that appearance differs, with specific characteristics attached to Protestants and Catholics, but this claim is harder to substantiate. The tactics available for such discovery were very recognizable to me.

I also found that the issue was more important in initial or superficial contacts, but that with deeper contacts, as people grew to trust that I valued their point of view, it became less so. I discovered that Northern Protestants relaxed when they found out I too was Protestant, and that this seemed to lead to an expectation that their point of view would be understood, rather than misrepresented (although their assumptions that I would have similar attitudes were often incorrect). I tended thus to announce my religion more readily to Protestants because it was an important feature in their opening up, and to assess the situation more carefully with Catholics.

In short, my own origin was of vital significance in my research: the more I seemed the same to my informants, the more advantageous this was seen to be, but it was of less importance the more a trusting relationship developed. The

situation was more complicated than Protestants simply being more comfortable with me than Catholics, as if a Catholic informant had Protestant friends already, or strongly espoused a non-sectarian attitude, I was considered less unusual, and thus more the same.

I also found that withholding my origins meant that my informants sometimes guessed my origins, usually suggesting that I was Catholic. If I asked why, my "Catholic name" was referred to and the fact that I was researching "Irish identity". Sometimes, however, people told me they just "knew", it was "obvious". Some also stated that it was better that an Irish person do such research than someone English, defining me as "Irish" no doubt because of my accent and the subject of my research.

I had two memorable experiences of not being welcomed in the fieldwork. One was at the London Irish Women's Centre, which I look at in detail in Chapter 6. The other was in a formal interview with an Irish centre co-ordinator. The co-ordinator had had a number of unhappy experiences with the press and other Irish Studies workers, and was wary, asking for references from me before he would talk to me. However, he relaxed as I reassured him, and he then apologised about his concern. The fact that he apologised, and that others were more readily hospitable is suggestive of these Irish migrants' expectations of themselves, that they will be open, friendly and hospitable to strangers. I certainly encountered many English people who expressed this expectation of the Irish to me, as well as informants who explicitly praised this aspect

of "Irish character".

Learning by one's mistakes is, as Scully (1994:340ff) points out, most instructive. I received challenges to my vocabulary, discovering that referring to "the South" or "Éire" was offensive to some people from here, who preferred "the Republic".<sup>3</sup> One man (whom I refer to in Chapter 5) also challenged me for distinguishing between the North and the Republic, seeing this recognition of the border as unacceptable. This was all part of my learning process. Obviously, there was enormous sensitivity to the words I used and the concepts they implied.

My relationship with my informants varied according to how often I saw them, whether they were in my core group, or more peripheral. It was also affected by my research techniques. If I knew I could see someone regularly, I tried not to direct conversation in any way, in order to see if s/he spontaneously talked about being Irish, or only if it was brought up by someone else. If the contact seemed likely to be fleeting or limited, I would be more directive, in order to get a picture quickly. Inevitably, I was closer to some informants than others and with my core group, I found I became, to varying degrees, friends. This, as I noted above, involved an inevitable tension with my research role.

I shall now look at two specific research methods, participant observation and the formal interview, and relate them to my fieldwork.

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<sup>3</sup> "The Republic" also carries less offence to Northern Protestants than "the 26 counties", for example, which implies an objection to partition.

## **SPECIFIC RESEARCH METHODS**

### **(i) PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

The question of whether anthropology's core methodological tool, participant observation, remains appropriate in the urban setting is a divisive one. It has led to re-evaluations of anthropology's self-definition, which has so long relied on its connection with this specific methodology.

Wallman (1982:190-191; 1984:43-44) suggests that participant observation is not possible in the city, but strongly challenges the idea that if it is not used, one is not "doing" anthropology. This reduces anthropology merely to a "technique of enquiry", she suggests. Instead, it is more appropriate to define anthropology by its "perspective". Thus, anthropology's focus is social life, context, meaning; it is, as Leach suggested, concerned not with units of population, but with people in relations with others. While participant observation was a valuable means to these ends, in the modern context, she continues, new methods must be found. Wallman's offering is inter-disciplinary (including an input from psychotherapy), but she notes that this is not prescriptive, merely one possible avenue.

Jenkins (1997:4-9) also suggests that participant observation as the source of anthropological authority needs to be re-examined in the modern context. He notes that boundaries between sociologists and anthropologists have become increasingly blurred and that what distinguishes anthropology is no longer either a territorial nor a methodological preserve of its own. He too stresses anthropology's

"distinctive perspective"; in his view it is: comparative; relativist; holistic; focusing on culture and meaning, local perceptions and knowledge; and documenting the routines of everyday life. The anthropologist will become redundant unless he adapts to a changing world, he suggests: new domains and methods of enquiry are needed to forge an anthropology

"that is unapologetically at home in large-scale, metropolitan, industrialized societies",

to provide a discipline defined not by its methods or places of work,

"but by its concerns and, above all, by its point of view".

Hannerz, thirdly, also considers that anthropology has a distinctive approach: he suggests it can offer the deep immersion in a culture which can reveal subtle nuances and penetrate the facade of impression management described by Goffman. However, he believes that participant observation remains relevant to the urban anthropologist: she

"is still a participant and an observer, taking an instrumental and eclectic view of complementary ways of finding facts. In method as in concepts, there can well be something distinctly anthropological about urban anthropology". (1980:315)

I support the suggestion that anthropology has a distinctive approach, and that it needs to be re-evaluated now that it is so firmly in the urban industrial context. It seems a valuable progression to understand anthropology as based on more than its methodological tools. However, I also believe that one can adapt and redefine participant observation in relation to the urban environment and that one need not reject it simply because of this adaptation. I shall now look in

more detail at my own participant observation.

I found that sharing in every aspect of one's informants' lives, from working patterns to sleeping habits, was not possible in the urban setting, especially as I did not focus on an "urban village". What was possible was a more selective participant observation. I thus, as I have indicated, singled out the domain of leisure: I participated in my informants' choice of leisure activity and observed them closely over a long period of time. This is clearly a more specialised type of fieldwork than one which can aspire to accompany informants into all spheres of their lives.

Thus, while it is possible to do comprehensive participant observation in a localised urban area, such as a housing block or street, a different kind of participant observation becomes relevant when the people one is researching are dispersed. While this is limited in its scope, it does provide valuable insights into non-localised social categories. It can, additionally, be carried out in a way which offers rich material in very specialised areas, such as the leisure category which I have highlighted.

Given the restrictions on participant observation as it is traditionally understood, it is appropriate to supplement it in other ways. Hannerz (1980) suggests a multi-method flexibility, where participant observation is combined with documents and archival data, oral history and "triangulation", a strategy of putting together data arrived at in different ways. This was indeed useful for me, as I consulted newspapers and other "community" literature, although they are



not cited often, and supplemented long term contacts with shorter term interviews.

In this, I followed what Agar (1980) advocates as a "funnel approach", that is, beginning with broad ethnography, and gradually narrowing focus into more formalised, hypothesis-testing approaches. This is, he suggests, dialectic, rather than linear, in that there is some combination of methods throughout, something I also found. Thus, I began with open-ended meetings, without specific questions, and as I developed ideas on what seemed worth investigating, and as my informants grew in confidence in expressing their opinions to me, I would ask more specific questions; at the end of my research, I conducted some taped interviews, which are the main source of my quotations. These were with a small number of core informants, and were a way of consolidating work done over the years of fieldwork, although they also revealed new material in many cases.

Agar (1980:13) suggests that this type of approach resolves the contradictions within ethnography itself, between humanity and science, involvement and detachment, breadth and depth, subordination and dominance, friend and stranger: the first member of each opposition is emphasised in the beginning and the second member at the end. These tensions are certainly ones I encountered, but I did not feel that they were resolved as simply as he suggests. For example, the involvement and friendship aspects increased throughout fieldwork as relationships with core informants deepened. The tension between these and the necessary detachment required to analyze

data was not resolved simply by conducting formal interviews.

#### **(ii) THE FORMAL INTERVIEW**

Formal interviews supplemented my informal, long-term and adapted participant observation. They came at the end of my fieldwork, but also occurred from time to time throughout it, for example, when I interviewed the co-ordinator of Aras na nGael on his vision for the centre. I shall now consider this research technique in more detail.

The utility of the formal interview is affected by the circumstances under which it is carried out. Ideally, one interviews someone where prior knowledge and rapport have been established, time is unlimited, the interviewee is keen to talk and is articulate and the subject is not sensitive. Such circumstances facilitate relaxed conversation, where the informant is encouraged to open up. For my tape-recorded interviews, a relationship had been established over the fieldwork period which meant that, apart from an initial uneasiness, most felt relaxed and trusting and were responsive to my questions. The small number of other formal interviews, not tape-recorded, which punctuated my early research offered less ideal conditions.

Even where conditions are good, however, problems remain as to the status of the information obtained through the formal interview: is it what the informant thinks? A quick answer to a complex or tricky question? What she thinks you want to hear? And so on. One can note hesitations and contradictions, but must guess their meaning, or pursue what might be sensitive in further interviews. Careful wording, statement of

alternatives and care not to bias responses improve its value, as Payne and others note. (Payne 1951; Merton & Kendall 1945-1946; Bell & Roberts 1984)

Another problem with the formal interview is that in certain senses it involves removing individuals from their habitual social contexts. Agar believes that this is a benefit in that it removes distracting peer pressure. However, this misses the fact that peer pressure is characteristic of most normal social contexts and thus part of the data. By artificially creating a "clean", two-person situation, one is in some senses altering the life one wishes to understand. Anthropology has traditionally resisted over-reliance on such techniques because of these problems, but much early anthropology used such methods, in addition to observation. The formal interview was of some use to me during my fieldwork: in an un-ideal world, committing an informant to a brief interview may be the only way one can obtain any of their time, knowledge or opinions. Indeed, Wiseman & Aron note that,

"everyone at one time or another has used this technique to learn more about a subject of interest". (1970:27)

It is, however, worth being clear about its limitations.

#### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I am, in this thesis, presenting an account of how a particular set of Irish individuals manage their identities. It is, I hope, suggestive and illuminating. It is not, of course, the only account that could have been written: looking through a different lens at the same set of people would have led to a different emphasis; likewise the same lens on another

collection of Irish migrants may not have revealed a similar picture. This is the case with all fieldwork: choices must be made which open some doors and close others, and some doors remain shut no matter how much one would wish to open them, due to the constraints of the fieldwork setting.

What are the implications of my material? The main contribution of this research is its focus on this particular collection of people; thus, I am looking through a very specific window at specific informants. While, in the main, I confine my conclusions to my informants, on some occasions, I offer more general conclusions about middle-class Irish ethnicity. I wish to stress that these are tentative, presented as suggestions, rather than representative of wider trends. Further research could usefully investigate whether my findings and conclusions are valuable for other groups, or in fact very specific to my own research boundaries.

In the next chapter, I shall commence my account of my informants' stories with their recollections of Ireland, the country in which these stories all began.

### CHAPTER 3

#### RECALLING IRELAND

"Home is where one starts from"

"The way forward is the way back"

"In my beginning is my end"

(Eliot 1983:21, 27, 35; Rapport and Dawson 1998:9) In this chapter, I wish to present "Ireland" as it was recalled by my informants. Scholars disagree as to the importance of pre-migration cultural experiences in understanding the present situation of migrants or minority ethnic populations. However, my informants had developed clear ideas, sometimes strong views, about where they had grown up and how this continued to be relevant to them. Giving such views their proper weight is a traditional task of anthropologists. (Al-Rasheed 1995:13; Aretxaga 1997:xii)

My informants' impressions were refracted through their varying pasts and experiences. These could differ in a structured way, according to religion, gender or locational background (North or Republic, urban/rural) but also in relation to individual histories and personalities. In this sense, many different Irelands were recalled.

Furthermore, recollections were conjured up for very present purposes. (Eriksen 1993:72, 94) Herzfeld (1997: 109) suggests that presenting "an unspoiled and irrecoverable past", a process he terms "structural nostalgia", relates to present actions, for example through legitimizing current deeds. Al Rasheed (1995:24) draws attention to how religious knowledge is used in Iraqi Assyrian Christians' everyday encounters with

non-Assyrians to construct an exclusive identity. The past therefore has an important role in the construction of identity in the present, and in furthering other, more specific goals and I return to this below. Given the variety of people and purposes recalling this past, Fog Olwig's (1998:226) suggestion, that "home" is a contested space rather than a refuge is perhaps unsurprising.

My informants' views are my primary focus in this chapter. I will supplement these with reflections on my own experience as an Irish migrant who recalls Ireland, and with references to the literature. These references will serve the purpose of contextualising and supporting my informants' views rather than providing an extensive analysis of Ireland/s, economic, political or cultural, as this has already been done by many authors. (Kearney 1988; Clancy et al 1986; Cooper & O'Shea 1973; Ruane and Todd 1992; 1998; Lyons 1985; Carter and Parker 1989; Pollak 1993; McFarlane 1986; Bruce 1986; Kells 1986; Donnison 5/7/73; Russell 26/7/73; Wallis, Bruce and Taylor 1986; Jenkins 1986; Darby 1976; Brody 1973; Lee 1978; MacCurtain and Ó Corráin 1978)

Much has been written in diaspora literature on the importance of the remembered homeland. Hall, (1990:230-2) analyzing Caribbean identities in relation to three "presences", African, European and American, suggests that the Africa which is recalled no longer exists in its remembered form. The distance from the Caribbean to Africa is thus geographical, but also across time, as the homeland which is remembered is located in the past. (Herzfeld 1997:109; Jansen 1998:96; Holy

1998:123)

My informants, however, differ from diaspora migrants in the following respects: they are not exiles; they can and do return to Ireland, visiting up to six times a year and in some cases returning "home" to live; they have been away for comparatively short periods; and they do not, in the manner of permanent migrants, construct a romantic view of the homeland. Thus, they are in touch with Ireland in the present, and with the changes which have occurred since they were resident there, and they are also less likely to idealise it, being confronted in their present visits with that which they found uncomfortable in the past.

I shall now present my informants' recollections in five sections. I begin with "home", the most general section, then move on to specific aspects of home: religion and politics; other divisions and differences; family; and personal freedom and change. It is clear that Ireland was not recalled homogenously; rather, different aspects of it were recalled at different times, and its divisions were highlighted. This is similar to the way in which "Irishness" was constructed by my informants, as I shall show throughout the thesis.

These presentations were vivid, and my informants had much to say about their homeland, both positive and negative. They experienced as negative the restrictive and sectarian aspects of their communities "at home" but also had many positive things to say about the countryside, the people and the culture.

This illustrates a theme I will pursue throughout the thesis,

that of my informants' desire to stay in touch with those elements of their ethnic heritage which they valued, while dissociating themselves from that which was restrictive in order to pursue their individual journeys. I will expand this in the final section, in which I also consider the changes occurring across Ireland which echo the desire for change found in my informants.

### **HOME**

My informants uniformly referred to the country they came from as "home", although a few felt that they now had two homes. "Home" was not always Ireland in its entirety, however, as the term could refer to specific areas, usually North or Republic. I look at these kind of divisions in the next section.

In the literature, it is also common to refer to the country which migrants have left as their "homeland" and "home" has been considered by a number of writers. Borneman (1992) connects it with a feeling of belonging. He suggests that state-creation (recently occurring in the Republic of Ireland) involves creating patterns of belonging, through a shared past, which assist its inhabitants to feel "at home".

Rapport and Dawson (1998:6-8) propose that "home" needs to be redefined to take account of the increasing mobility and globalization characteristic of today's world. Its traditional conception as the physical centre of one's universe is no longer relevant, they suggest, but rather,

"for a world of travellers...home comes to be found in a routine set of practices...habitual interactions, in styles of dress and address, in memories and myths, in stories carried around in one's head".

People are, they continue, more at home now in "words, jokes,



opinions, gestures, actions", in the routine practices and narrations which do not merely tell of home but represent it, and which serve as cognitive homes in themselves. Other contributors to their volume also propose areas which can be conjured up as home: discursive imagery (Rapport), written accounts of the homeland (Jansen), and the family (James).

What is the purpose of recalling home? Rapport (1998:80) suggests that it is about continuing an elsewhere - in my informants' cases, this would mean keeping Ireland alive. Several writers stress its relevance for identity-formation in the present. Jansen, paraphrasing Baumann on home and nation, suggests that

"the act of telling the story of it creates the 'we' that belongs to it" (1998:86)

and suggests that the stories people tell about their pasts have more to do with the "shoring up" of self than with historical truth. (Ibid:89) In the same volume, Fog Olwig (1998:225-6) suggests that home is an important basis for personal identity and also a focal point for studying it. She points out that varied home sites can lead to very different self-knowledge and identities. James, (1998:144) lastly, suggests that home is an idea that guides our actions and a spatial context where identities are worked on.

I shall now return to my informants. In their discursive accounts of Ireland, which recalled past and also more recent experiences, they presented their identities as well as the place they had left. By orienting themselves in relation to Ireland, they demonstrated something of their beliefs, values

and heritage. Ireland was remembered in a variety of ways, according to context and audience, as: distinctive, differing from London, positive, negative, divided, and changing. I too had varying recollections in each of these areas and I recognised the Irelands my informants presented.

I shall now look at these recollections in more detail. Ireland was, first of all, recalled frequently as a place of natural beauty. "In Ireland the colours are more vivid", one woman suggested. Another (Elizabeth) remembered her farm in Larne, which overlooked the sea, and reminisced about walking on the nearby beach, breathing in the fresh air and listening to the sounds of the birds. She stressed that this was not merely her subjectivity, but that her local area was officially registered as a place of "natural beauty". On another occasion, when I asked Elizabeth what came to mind when she thought of Northern Ireland, she replied,

"the land sweeping down to the sea as in the Mountains of Mourne ... along the Antrim coast you have these tilled fields like ladder fields and they just stretch right down to the sea ... our farm overlooks the sea, but you look through trees and green fields onto the Lough. The greenness, when I go home, I marvel at it, it's like looking through everything with green-tinted spectacles".

She concluded, "You're making me homesick." Caroline wrote poetry on milking cows on her grandfather's farm in Kerry, another image of rural idyll. Such rural scenes were contrasted to the noise, pollution and sheer density of London, which were seen as negatives. I also remembered fondly the green beauty of Ireland, but was conscious I had not particularly appreciated it when I was there. When I mentioned this to informants, they agreed that their

appreciation too had heightened post-migration.

Cities in Ireland could also be remembered positively, specifically those cities my informants had known or lived in. Dublin was the most frequently cited. One informant happily described the atmosphere in Dublin at Christmas, for example, and its liveliness was conjured up by other informants. This recalls Wallman's suggestion (1998:182, 184) that home is compounded of identities of place and people, that is, how people identify the city (within the limits of what the city is capable of being) and how people identify themselves in it.

The scale of Irish cities was also recalled by many: being smaller than London one could readily meet people one knew in city centres, and the streets were less crowded. One informant, Tony, happily remembered sitting in MacDonalds in a main street in Dublin, knowing he would see three or four people he knew passing by each time he was there. Other informants recalled Belfast, Derry and Cork, praising their familiarity, their size and their people.

Ireland was represented specifically through its people: "the people are the great thing about Ireland", one man told me. This included their characteristics, their customs and their culture. The character of Irish people, firstly, was contrasted with English people, a subject I return to in Chapter 7. Irish people were represented as friendly, warm, spontaneous, hospitable and open. They were seen as more relaxed, the pace of life in Ireland correspondingly more slow and restful, although there were differences between

representations of the North and the Republic in this respect. Elizabeth lyrically illustrated this by suggesting that in London,

"I think of life just passing by and ... a constant whirlwind, whereas at home it's like water trickling".

The social side of Ireland and the "craic" (or "crack", meaning fun), which one man suggested "has its proper priority" in Ireland, were connected with this. It was easier to make friends in Ireland, many suggested, because the Irish were more friendly and open, and informants also recalled happily the existence of close, often childhood friends in Ireland back "home".

However, negative representations were also offered of the people. One woman said how "awful" the people were:

"you hate them when you're back and yet you're forever yearning for them in London".

For many informants, absence was recalled: Ireland was represented as "depressing", "dead", empty, because so many people they knew had emigrated.

Moving on to customs, Caroline described, with laughter, how upon first emigrating to America, when offered a cup of coffee she would refuse, knowing that in Ireland you refuse three times, she suggested, before giving in. To her shock, in the States, she was not offered again, and had to learn to say yes more rapidly. This recalls customs of politeness. She also recalled, and practised, ways of talking which were distinctive in Ireland, "sure what harm?" for example, and "you can't be letting these things get to you".

Informants remembered how often and with what passion people

in Ireland discussed the weather; on one occasion, having indulged in this at length with one informant, and realising what we were doing, we laughed uproariously as she suggested that the reason was that we had both just come back from trips "home". Other small differences of custom which were highlighted included shopping habits, ways of visiting people, the manner in which Irish people emphasized and knew genealogies, the custom of "dropping-in" rather than arranging visits.

Linde-Laursen (1993) has highlighted the significance which trivialities such as these can assume in marking identity, illustrating this by describing Swedish and Danish attitudes to dish-washing. The humour and self-deprecation which could accompany my informants' narratives also recalls Herzfeld's (1997) concept of cultural intimacy.

Irish culture (a category which subsumes customs) was remembered fondly, Martin telling me,

"I am very keen to promote..the valuable things in Ireland",

which he defined as

"music.. (and) the culture in Ireland: there is a great richness in Ireland in that subject area; the quality of life ... is one of the best in the world; it's certainly one of the best in Europe".

The literary and oral traditions in Ireland were lauded as well and experience of other Irish "traditions" such as Irish dancing.

Irish food and drink were remembered fondly by some informants, such as beef sausages (rarely available in London), bacon and cabbage, champ, although others declared,

for example, that they had never liked bacon and cabbage when in Ireland and had no intention of eating it in Irish venues in London. The poor quality of Guinness in England was commented on, and how differently people behaved in pubs in England. Opening hours and social practices in pubs were both held to be different; this included the amounts of alcohol consumed, whether drinks were bought in rounds or individually, and what happened if you entered a pub alone in each country.

Cultural practices such as weddings, funerals and wakes were held to be "done" well in Ireland and to differ from the practice in England. I attended one wedding in London during my fieldwork, where I was told, "they do things differently here" (that is, in England); this was related to the level of "crack", the absence of a band, and the placing of the wedding cake at the side rather than in the centre of the table. In this way, again, small differences can be given great significance. (Akenson 1988)

The Irish language was picked out by some people as distinctive, either because of the requirement or the opportunity to learn it. Al Rasheed (1995:27) discusses the use of religious language (Syriac-Aramaic) among Iraqi Assyrian Christians in London as a symbol to establish authenticity rather than a means of communication. This has some relevance to the Irish case, where the capacity to communicate effectively in Irish was limited to a few, but the owning of it as "our" language was much more widespread. As Akenson (1988:136, 138) points out, and as I also experienced

in Ireland, this has, however, been effectively captured by Catholic Irish as a symbol of "their" culture, and Protestants correspondingly distance themselves from it. During fieldwork I attended Irish language classes and encountered only one other Irish Protestant there, a retired woman from Belfast.

Ruane and Todd (1998:197) suggest that Catholics have succeeded in claiming Irish culture in general, which they define as language, literature, music, dance and Gaelic games; this is, they continue, the only area where Protestant cultural domination is effectively challenged. While my own experience in Ireland is that it was considered inappropriate and taboo for Protestants to involve themselves in "Irish" culture, during fieldwork I encountered more Protestants who had learned Irish dancing and appreciated Irish music than I expected. Those who had experienced Irish dancing as children challenged my surprise at this, declaring it to be "normal", but one informant also described how he had to abandon his Irish dancing due to peer pressure. My fieldwork would thus lead me to suppose that Ruane and Todd are broadly correct, but that there are significant exceptions to the monopoly they describe.

Many informants lauded the education system in Ireland, North and Republic for its quality. Some said it was a reason to raise children there. Further education is increasingly chosen in Ireland (Clancy 1986:116,128; Murray 1986:246) in contrast to England (The Independent 31/5/91). The religious aspect of schooling was also recalled by some Catholic

informants as negative, however.

Some informants presented Ireland as relaxing, as one might hope "home" would be. This could be because of the slower pace of life, noted above, or due to its familiarity, which meant one knew how to react to people. One person said she felt this because "when I'm in Ireland I feel more myself". Another said she felt that she "fitted in" when she returned (to Cork) and that her home place was secure and unchanging. However, more informants expressed the opposite, describing themselves as "oddballs" and emphasizing divisions and conflict in their home place (as emphasized by Fog Olwig). It is these divisions in the home which I turn to next. I begin with the most obvious of them, religion and politics.

#### **RELIGION AND POLITICS**

Ireland was recalled, by most informants, as a place where religion was much more widely practised than in London. The Irish, as a result, were seen as more religious than the English. Martin suggested that the "spiritual nature to Irish people" was a positive about his homeland:

"Irish people (are) more in touch with the religious side of life..I call that quality".

I look at religion in much more detail in Chapter 9, but consider it here as it relates to recollections of Ireland.

Clancy et al (1986) and Cooper & O'Shea (1973) have much to say on the extent of religiosity in Ireland, and how it differs from England. The form of Christianity in Ireland and England differs in terms of the spread of denominations, and church attendance and levels of belief are both much higher in



Ireland. (Phádraig 1986:140, 149; Hickey; 1986:267-272; Ruane and Todd 1992:75) There are, of course, variations within Ireland in terms of gender, age, rural/urban origin, as well as between North and Republic. (Phádraig 1986:148-152; Ruane & Todd 1992:80)

Most of my informants described religion in Ireland as oppressive. One woman said,

"we suffer from having too much of the church", and many complained of having religion "rammed down ... (their) throat(s)". This was due to the expectations of how they would live, for example, that certain activities were unacceptable (ranging from washing the car on a Sunday, to openly having pre-marital sex) and others deemed essential, such as attending Mass.

For some Catholics, this perception was related to memories of schooling with nuns or Christian brothers, which led one woman to declare that she could not see a nun without shuddering. The degree of religious control of schools post-1980 remains "almost without parallel", according to Clancy, (1986:121-3) with 88% of schools in the Republic controlled by Catholic religious communities in 1982. A few informants lamented the religious separation of schools. This has a long history: Akenson (1988:116-126) notes its importance in the 18th and 19th centuries and Murray (1986) analyzes its role in contemporary Northern Irish schools. Some informants spoke positively of integrated schools; however, none had actually attended these and they represent less than 1% of the total schools in Northern Ireland.

The Catholic church was criticised by my female, Catholic informants (and others) for being patriarchal. However, at a meeting of women to discuss a potential Channel 4 broadcast on women in religion, it was suggested that at least Catholic women were represented in their religion, through the "cult" of Mary, presence in the liturgy and the status accorded to devout Catholic women (especially if married); Protestantism was felt to lack this. Patriarchy and sexism were located outside the church also by many women, and considered undesirable.

Women from the Republic tended to complain about the church's control over women's bodies and their sexuality, in areas such as divorce, abortion and contraception. Divorce is prohibited by article 41.3.2 of the Republic's constitution, (Curtin 1986:160) which aims to protect women's role in the family with a view to preserving the overall unit (see page 108). However, there is a conflict between the ideal and the actual, as certain laws demonstrate awareness of social problems following martial breakdown. (Ibid:168-9) Abortion is illegal in the Republic, although Faith (1992) and White (1992) highlight the extent to which women travel from the Republic to obtain these. Contraception was only freely available to over 18 year-olds in 1992 and condoms widely available in 1993.

Church intervention in family and sexual matters has thus traditionally been considered legitimate in the Republic. It is clear that the State has considerable influence on the individual life course, a point made by Borneman (1992) in

relation to Berlin, and the church's influence over the State was lamented by these informants.

Church values also influence the laws in Northern Ireland, particularly regarding sexual behaviour. Divorce is possible in the North, but taboo and Britain's 1969 Divorce Law Reform Act does not apply. Divorce rates and illegitimate births are both low, compared to rates in Britain. Abortion remains illegal in Northern Ireland, contrary to the situation in Great Britain. However, information on the availability of abortion elsewhere is not banned, as it was in the Republic during my fieldwork. Consent for heterosexual sex is set at 17, one year older than Britain. Contraception was available when I was growing up, in the 1980s, but only from Protestant chemists. In short, laws and practice in Northern Ireland are, like the Republic, affected by a conservative religious morality focused on sexual mores, stemming here as much from conservative Protestantism as from Catholicism.

My lesbian informants also complained of the church's oppressive attitudes to their sexuality. The current legal situation regarding homosexuality in the Republic is, however, liberal, with a common age of consent for both heterosexual and homosexual sex of 17, established in 1993. (Smith 8/2/94) However, attitudes were experienced as far from liberal by my informants. In Northern Ireland, homosexual consent was 18 at the time of fieldwork, like Britain,<sup>1</sup> but homosexuality faced strong moral opposition, for example, through Rev. Ian

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<sup>1</sup> The House of Commons voted to reduce this to 16 in 1998.

Paisley's "Save Ulster from Sodomy" campaign.

While religious ideology limits what is legally and socially permissible, my informants from the North were much less likely to draw attention to this as a source of dissatisfaction and a reason to migrate. This is partly because "the Troubles" fulfilled this function and were much more deeply preoccupying. This meant that other issues were not simply avoided in public, but also less likely to be conscious in private.

Secondly, Protestants can hold proudly to their religious freedom, as something which differentiates them from Catholics, particularly from Catholics in the Republic. Even where my informants challenged traditional sectarian views, this attitude tended to prevail, and militated against criticism or awareness of religious restrictions in the North. For Catholics, the view that there is greater freedom in the North than in the Republic, which is after all supported by legal differences in the two states, is also compelling. To criticise the lack of religious freedom in the North would be, by implication, to more greatly condemn the Republic, whose laws are stricter.

Thus, while Protestants represent the North as a place of greater religious freedom than the Republic, I suggest that Catholics also tacitly accept this view. This ideological representation, while based on the comparative legal situations of North and Republic, does not take account of the fact that social and moral prohibitions in the North limit behaviour in a forceful way, and greatly reduce any actual

difference in behaviour.

The separation of Protestant and Catholic in Ireland was something which my informants had experienced and which they disliked. This separation is found in various areas and I draw on my own experience here as well as the literature. Each faith has separate world views and is insulated from the other, with their own networks, key allegiances and symbols. In Northern Ireland, Protestants and Catholics attend separate schools, which do not, on the whole, educate pupils about alternative religious or cultural groups. This, as I have indicated, was criticized by some of my informants. Protestants and Catholics also live in separate areas, choose different holiday locations and social venues, demonstrate separate occupational profiles, and support their co-religionists for services, such as shops, bars, and legal advice. One is born into this world and expected to defend it and violence makes movement outside the communal worlds dangerous, both in imagination and in actuality. (Ruane & Todd 1992:90)

This separation and its concomitant sectarian bigotry was lamented by many informants, especially but not exclusively those from the North. One man, for example, recalled with horror a mixed religious fête organised by the local Women's Institute, where the vicar of the church hosting the event was warned that if it was held in the church hall, he would face armed resistance. I was told a number of stories like this, presented as something my informants wished to distance themselves from; some informants simply stated that they hated

the "whole religion/politics thing".

Discrimination against Catholics was also recalled negatively by both Catholics and Protestants. Discrimination is shown in employment figures, for example by Miller. (1986:224-7; Coward 1986:184; Donnison 5/7/73; Appendix 3) Van Niekerk (1995) analyzes how in Surinam one religious group became associated with success (Hindustanis) and another with failure (Creoles) and the problems of attributing this to cultural differences rather than economic factors or discrimination. This is analogous to the stereotype of hard working Protestants and lazy Catholics which can be used by Protestants in Northern Ireland to justify their success and to deny discrimination. None of my informants presented such images to me, however, although I have heard them many times in Northern Ireland.

Prejudice against both religious groups was disliked, although my informants were to varying degrees, still influenced by it (see Chapter 9). Negative attitudes to mixed marriages were lamented by the small number of couples among my informants who had the experience of having a partner of the "other" religion. McFarlane (1986:94-5) notes the importance in Northern Ireland of marrying "your own", specifically your own religious group, mixed marriages being seen as letting your family down, and showing a lack of commitment to your own religious and political grouping. (Borneman 1992:298; Akenson 1988:110-115)

However, these informants are in a sense typical of the changing situation in Northern Ireland (and the Republic) as

Ruane and Todd (1998:78, 248) note the increasing toleration of mixed marriage in modern Ireland. They are also typical in remaining a minority among the larger group: it is important not to overstate changes in this area, particularly in Northern Ireland, where the issue remains highly charged.

How "real" are these religious differences between Protestants and Catholics? One (mixed marriage) couple felt that religion was used as a cover for other issues, and others were also inclined to doubt the rhetorical basis to the religious separation of Protestant and Catholic.

Al-Rasheed, (1995:11, 24) discussing the role of religion among Assyrian Christians in London, suggests that religion can be used in the absence of cultural distinctiveness to delineate boundaries. She suggests that the issue for the analyst is not to establish the truth of claims, but rather, to look at how religious knowledge can be used to articulate identity. This correlates with the way in which I have suggested that my informants use ideas about "home" to establish their identity in London. Akenson, (1988) looking at Irish migrants 1815-1922, similarly concludes that differences between Protestants and Catholics are, in fact, "small" and that they are exaggerated in order to assist in self-definition. These authors, I suggest, develop views held by my informants, which express scepticism about the validity of the religious differences.

Looking in more detail at how this emphasis on difference arose, Jenkins (1997:93) suggests that religion became the cultural marker of difference because this was how Protestants

categorized their ethnic "other". From the time of the penal laws forward, he suggests, religion was the nominal boundary, whose virtualities (or consequences) were felt through economic circumstances and violence.

Jenkins (ibid:111-123) also tackles the related question of whether the conflict is "about" religion or not. He concludes that while Northern Ireland is more religious than Britain, religion is only a contributory factor to a conflict which is primarily about constitutional and nationalist issues. It provides, however, a "vocabulary" and an "arena" through which the conflict can be waged and this remains important at every level. This is also, he maintains, the emic view. (Jenkins 1986; Darby 1976:114)

Ruane and Todd, (1998:xiv, 4, 77-78, 290) by contrast, stress the importance of religion: it is religion which divides and marks the communities even though the conflict is overtly about economics, politics or identity, they suggest. They emphasize multidetermination, that is the overlap between religious and other differences and between cultural differences and power structures.

They also look at the development of Catholic and Protestant into coherent communities and identify the elements which reinforce each other to perpetuate difference and conflict: (i) a set of overlapping dimensions of difference, specifically, religion, ethnicity, settler-native status, concepts of progress and backwardness, and national identity and allegiance; (ii) a structure of dominance, dependence and inequality; and (iii) a tendency to communal polarisation.



Religious differences and images of the other have thus been reinforced by power, social structural and political differences. While they recognise what is shared by Protestants and Catholic, their emphasis is very much on that which separates.

In a sense, both views are accurate: religious differences are of great importance in dividing communities in Northern Ireland. Yet this division relates to issues of self identification and self interest rather than religion per se. Religion is thus a means to an end, not the single cause of the division, as it is often portrayed. My informants and their compatriots recognise both of these realities: the centrality of religion and also the way in which it is manipulated. In London, this situation has changed and my informants' interests and their identity-constructions were not predicated on the opposition of Protestant and Catholic.

I shall now consider briefly the political dimensions to this conflict. I look at current political views in more detail in Chapter 10, and focus here on politics as they were recalled in Ireland.

Politics frustrated my informants as much as religion had done. The "Troubles" in Northern Ireland were deemed both a reason for leaving and a disincentive to return or to bring up children there. People talked of the "rhetoric" surrounding the violence in much the same way they complained of religious rhetoric. Elizabeth, who had witnessed someone she knew being shot, was particularly sensitive to this subject. (See Chapter

10; also Appendix 4 for statistics on the number of deaths due to "the Troubles".)

In general, my informants presented Northern Ireland as a place where religion was expected to determine politics. Protestants, on the whole, were expected to be Unionist, supporting Union with Britain and Catholics to be Nationalist, supporting a United Ireland. This expectation conflicted with what a number of my informants wished for themselves - namely, the opportunity to hold independent views and also to move beyond a continual emphasis on partition, towards other political issues.

However, even in Northern Ireland this expectation of simple sectarian alignments, while forwarded as an ideal and vigorously, even violently defended, is not the whole story. In a review of opinion polls in Northern Ireland 1974-82, Pringle (1989) reports that the percentage of Catholics favouring a united Ireland never exceeded 41%; 66% regarded it as an "acceptable" solution, but 45% regarded integration into the U.K. as acceptable.

Ruane & Todd (1992:75-6; 1998:59, 71) point out that while Protestants appeared united in supporting union with Britain, there were significant differences between them in institutional preferences, such as devolution, power-sharing, integration with Britain, and in reasons for supporting the Union. In interviews they conducted, furthermore, opposition to Irish unity appeared much more open and conditional than is usually portrayed. They also suggest that a number of imagined communities are possible: for Protestants - British,

Ulster, Northern Irish, Irish, and for Catholics - Irish Northern Irish and British. Thus, political views are held in Northern Ireland which challenge these simplistic classifications which on another level are aspired to and presented as ideals. The separation between ideal and more practical representations is clear.

Religious and political loyalties can, of course, overlap, as do the other calls on people's loyalties. For example, in West Belfast, a strong sense of local community joins with overwhelmingly Catholic and Republican affiliations to provide a compelling sense of cohesion and unity. On other occasions, alternative community links can cross-cut each other. Inter-community links and intra-communal tension and divergences are both demonstrated forcefully by Ruane & Todd. (1992)

In the Republic, the two major contemporary parties in Dáil Éireann (the Irish government) are Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the former aspiring uncompromisingly to a united Ireland, the latter more pragmatic and compromising. Both trace their origins back to their attitudes to partition; in other respects, their policies are similar. (See Appendix 5 for further details on partition.)

My informants from the Republic did not tend to discuss the parties there much. Perhaps this is because of what Hazelkorn (1986) has described as the brokerage nature of politics there. In this system, T.D.s (members of the Dáil) act as patrons who can dispense favours, reinforcing the status quo. Politicians tend to be evaluated in terms of their individual talents and their effectiveness in addressing constituents'

issues, and larger issues are not addressed. (See Chapter 10.)

In short, the politics of Northern Ireland were considered frustrating by my informants and they disliked dwelling on them, through, I suggest, a mixture of weariness and wariness; politics in the Republic were not discussed at any length either, mainly, I felt, because they were not considered of interest. The connections of Northern Irish politics with religion and of politics in the Republic with partition were, in both cases, considered narrow and undesirable and they contributed to my informants' sense of claustrophobia, which I return to below.

#### **OTHER DIVISIONS & DIFFERENCE**

From the outside and viewed superficially, Ireland seems to exhibit little marked "difference", as the majority population are white, Christian and English speaking. My informants sometimes advanced this view by contrasting Ireland's homogeneity, where people were "more or less the same", as one informant put it, with the cultural and ethnic diversity of London. However, Ireland was also remembered through its divisions.

One of the most striking of these was the awareness of the border, which was shared by all informants. This was experienced as being of great importance, regardless of the political aspirations of my informants. People from across the border were perceived as markedly different, in their experiences and also in their characters. I look at this again in Chapter 7.

One informant suggested it was easier to get into an argument with someone from the North, as Northerners were more aggressive and touchy, whereas people from the Republic were more placid and easy going. I was told (by informants from the Republic) that I was a typical Northerner because I was outspoken and direct. People from the Republic tended to refer to one or two people they might know from the North as if this was something that required comment. The North was often pictured as dangerous, "other", the people as wary, tough, outspoken, direct, frightening.

Sometimes people had had experiences which led to these views. For example, one man from the Republic was held at gunpoint for 45 minutes at the border as a result, he told me, of mistaken identity. Another, Martin, spoke of visiting a republican friend in Belfast, where he witnessed a "child" hijack a bus at gunpoint, and walked through a wasteland of burning vehicles.

Northerners in turn expressed hostility towards those from the Republic. Martin's friend, although aspiring to union with the Republic, described Martin as "Free State shit", using this term for the Republic as an insult. It was known that people from the Republic could be fearful of visiting the North and this was ridiculed by some Northern informants. They told me stories of Dubliners playing jokes on visiting Northerners and of Gardai officers (the police force in the Republic) suggesting that Northerners go back to their own country. Alistair described those from the Republic as a "race apart", a view echoed by others. Some talked in terms

of there being two different identities and Elizabeth expressed this in terms of the Republic being identified with culture and heritage and the North with "the Troubles".

My informants also identified their "home" specifically as North or Republic. Informants from the Republic often referred exclusively to the Republic when they spoke of "Ireland", and would distance themselves from any knowledge of the North. Likewise Northerners emphasized the North as their area of knowledge and interest.

Ruane and Todd (1998:250-2) write on this subject, describing how the Republic became distanced from Northern Ireland, and both began to follow separate paths. They describe the guilt felt in the Republic at the abandonment of Northern Catholics at partition, and other responses of pain, anger and pragmatism. (Ó Connor 1993) They also refer to stereotypes of Northerners as trouble makers, backward, violent and extreme.

Furthermore, they suggest (ibid:257-261) that Northern Protestants and Catholics have a number of responses to the Republic. Protestants, firstly, demonstrate three orientations: (i) hostility; (ii) seeing the Republic simply as a foreign country; or (iii) an open-minded approach, viewing it as different but not "foreign" and showing willingness to visit. My informants demonstrated all of these attitudes, in varying combinations.

Ulster Catholic attitudes are, they propose, ambivalent and include the following responses: (i) idealisation (unusual); (ii) feeling abandoned by the Republic; (iii) feeling shocked

and offended by the response in the Republic to "the Troubles"; (iv) needing the Republic to counteract their minority status in Northern Ireland. The most pertinent for my informants was the sense of shock and outrage which they felt about attitudes held in the Republic, not only towards "the Troubles", but to the North in general, and to Northerners like themselves in particular.

On a less emotive note, Ruane and Todd (ibid:75) suggest that there are symbols of Irish identity which are shared island-wide, such as holding an Irish passport, but that their meaning varies between North and Republic. This is clearly true. They also note (ibid:290-1) that partition "did not mark a new beginning", as the differences which had previously been perceived between the two religious communities were, rather, transferred to the North/South axis, and previous structures of inequality continued in modified form. For my informants, however, born post-partition, the border was the focal marker.

Class is another source of division which was highlighted by a number of informants. Interestingly, it was generally raised in order to express its unimportance in Ireland. This was contrasted with England, where it was felt that class divisions were much more prominent. In Ireland, my informants told me, although class differences existed, people talked to each other across the class boundary.

Hazelkorn (1986:336) notes how, on the subject of whether class differences are in fact important in Ireland, politics in the Republic strives, successfully, to exclude issues

relating to class difference. Similarly, parties focusing on class or non-sectarian issues in Northern Ireland have failed historically to gain significant support. However, the Trade Union Movement in the Republic has succeeded in unionising 57% of the workforce, which Hazelkorn describes as a higher figure than "its more industrialised neighbours" and I suggest that although class differences have not structured formal political activity, this does not render them as unimportant as my informants suggested.

My informants did, in fact, acknowledge the fact of class, but put their own interpretations forward: one felt that the major class distinction in Ireland was between town and country. Another, from his experience in the Republic, differentiated working class, middle class, aspiring aristocratic, and "on top", English ascendancy. He felt there were more levels in London than in Ireland, with at least three types of working class, which he defined as "immigrant - black/Asian, South London white, and East Ender".

Elizabeth suggested that class was more to do with education and social status in Northern Ireland, with teachers and doctors being more highly regarded there, whereas in England, it was more to do with money. Peillon (1986:102, 104-6) makes a similar point about prestige in the Republic. He regards it as an element of class differentiation which may or may not accompany high income. Other informants felt that class was only to do with money in Ireland, and was merely a question of whether you habitually wore a suit, or could afford to attend the opera. So, while my informants tended to underplay the



importance of class in Ireland, they did have things to say about it.

Why then are class differences played down by my informants? McFarlane, (1986:97) writing on Northern Ireland, describes the playing down of such hierarchical differences as a polite fiction. In Ireland, it is considered shameful to recognise that class divides, as it conflicts with ideals of equality and anti-pretension. (Donnan & McFarlane 1986:393) This accords with my own experience of growing up in Northern Ireland and also held true, I felt, for my informants. In addition, in London, I suggest that my informants used their recollections of class as less prominent to present Ireland as somewhere where people were more humane: as I have shown, the human side of Ireland was something which they were keen to stress in other ways. (Miller 1986:231-241; Donnan & McFarlane 1986:381-4)

The next source of difference I wish to examine is gender, which has a role in constructing and transforming ethnic identities which, according to Banks (1996:102) has been under-researched. Gender was a very relevant variable in recollections of Ireland and led to differences in representations. Women had much more to say about the repressive nature of the church in Ireland, as I have shown. They also complained of the sexism in Ireland, and described instances of patriarchal control in their families, which they found restricting. Laws and attitudes governing contraception, divorce and abortion, which I have discussed above, also restricted women's choices and their control over

their destiny and their bodies. This was contrasted with Britain, where female informants felt they had greater freedom.

Gender roles in Ireland, as elsewhere, have traditionally been distinct. (Ó Tuathaigh 1978) Article 41 of the Constitution of the Republic states:

"the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall therefore endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home".

This indicates a clear separation of roles by gender, with women identified primarily as home-makers. This, according to Shannon, is still very prevalent today. A 1972 Commission on the Status of Women in the Republic documented women's exclusion from political and economic power, their stereotyped role in the home and the pervasively negative images of women. (Shannon 1992:20-1; McCarthy 1978:103; Aretxaga 1997:62-3)

This report led to real changes, including the 1973 removal of the marriage bar, previously preventing women in the Republic from teaching and working in the civil service after marriage. In 1977, an Anti-discrimination Act prohibited discrimination against married women (Jackson 1986:301) and in 1974, the Anti-discrimination Act (Pay) made it unlawful to pay women less than men for similar work. (McCarthy 1978:109) By 1978, many of the 1970 Commission's recommendations were secured through Dáil legislation. Further changes included Mary Robinson's election as the first female President of the Republic in 1990 and the growth of women's groups and women's

studies. (Shannon 1992) A 1990 Commission led to further legal changes.

Much inequality, however, remains, as I detail in Appendix 6. Although women's position and choices have greatly improved thanks to years of feminist campaigning, there continue to be significant disparities between male and female opportunities in both the North and Republic (as, indeed, in England). The possibility for frustration remains great and often connects, among my informants, with frustration at religious restrictions. This tends to be more of an issue for informants from the Republic, perhaps because in the North women have benefitted from greater legal freedom as regards divorce, information on abortion and contraception.

Moving on to sexuality, divisions between "straight" and "gay" Irish people were also mentioned by informants, although the largely hidden nature of "gay Ireland" during their residence reduced the prominence of such tensions. It was therefore much more of an issue for my lesbian informants.<sup>2</sup> Heterosexual informants tended to notice these divisions much more post-migration; this was particularly evident in women's groups I attended at the London Irish Women's Centre (see Chapter 6).

Another way in which my informants differentiated themselves was through identification with local area. Alistair spoke proudly of Tyrone as the most important county of Ireland historically: he recalled how the Kings of Ulster were crowned close to his home town in the county. Locational

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<sup>2</sup> None of my informants were gay men.

identifications with small village, farmland, or city area, as described by my informants, are also documented in the literature.

This concurs with my experience of Ireland: in the small town I grew up in, after week-end discos, young men used to fight other men from a town ten miles away, simply because they were from that town and not from their own; likewise, people from country areas surrounding my home town, while listing the town in their address, identified primarily with the "townland", that is, the named area outside the town where they lived.

My informants also presented regional stereotypes of different areas, as I detail in Chapter 7, and identification with precise area of origin could be embedded in complex ideas of what people from there were 'like'. In general, the rural-urban divide was significant, (Pringle 1989:44) spawning derogatory terms such as "culchie" for country dwellers, and rural-urban divisions were seen as accompanied by different values, life-styles and priorities.

It is clear then that many differences and divisions within Ireland were advanced by my informants. Cohen's (1986:17) suggestion that almost any perceived difference can be a symbolic resource for emphasis on a community's boundary and that people can "think themselves into difference" is particularly relevant for communities which may appear homogenous to outsiders. Thus the difference itself is less important than the meaning attributed to it.

Correspondingly, Murray (1986:255) suggests that in Northern

Ireland, it is the intolerance of difference which is crucial. This is because cultural difference there is synonymous with political aspirations which are seen as mutually exclusive. Thus, the resonances of those differences which relate to culture, politics, religion and the meaning they hold for the inhabitants of Northern Ireland, mean that difference in these areas can not be tolerated. To accept the point of view of the 'other' in these areas is perceived as invalidating one's own position and betraying one's own tradition. In such a climate, difference of any kind is likely to be experienced as threatening and accompanied by a need to attack it.

Pearce (1986:120) offers a contrasting view of the Republic, suggesting that the "savouring" of individuality is "central to community life", and diversity within Irish communities celebrated. Yet he suggests that,

"the identity of particular individuals is circumscribed by and subsumed under the collective identity of the community", (ibid:116)

contradicting his general thesis.

Certainly, my informants, either from North or Republic, did not endorse his view that diversity is celebrated in Ireland. It may be that a certain amount of idiosyncrasy is tolerated within communities. Undoubtedly, there is a continuum, with what is seen as an acceptable level of diversity on one end, and a betrayal of fundamental values on the other. In Northern Ireland, idiosyncrasy which threatens to take a person outside their religious community would be located at the unacceptable end of the continuum. In the Republic, one example of unacceptable divergence from the dominant ideology

is likely to be the expressing of gay/lesbian sexuality.

The degree to which difference is considered intolerable thus varies, according to the extent of perceived relevance or threat; this in turn will vary, according to whether one is in the North or Republic, in rural or urban area, Protestant or Catholic. Age and gender are also relevant variables in sectarian division, and individual personality, certain individuals being unquestionably more open than others.

Individuals can also manipulate rules to suit the demands of particular situations, and McFarlane (1986:101) notes strategies and rules for emphasizing and de-emphasizing boundaries on different occasions in Northern Ireland. While the background, especially in Northern Ireland, may be of intolerance of difference, certain differences are thus more bearable than others; other factors may also encourage the playing down of difference. Overall, however, difference is regarded as potentially very threatening and this was not a context my informants thrived in.

#### **FAMILY**

"Home" and "family" are now virtually interchangeable terms, suggests Oakley. (Cited in James 1998:143) This seems very relevant to my informants, who spoke often, with passion, about their families. Their families were an important reason why Ireland continued to matter to them and a way in which they oriented themselves to "home". This was also clear in the small number of informants who no longer had family in Ireland, as they felt their connections with Ireland had greatly loosened as a result.

Families provided for my informants a "feel good" factor of belonging, clearly an important aspect of home. (Wallman 1982:109) However, James (1998:143-4) suggests that migrancy and other technological changes, which have enabled work at home, have blurred these conceptual boundaries, making it harder in his view to know where a familial "home" begins and ends. I felt that this blurring occurred for my informants in the sense that their connection with their ethnicity, their country of origin and their families were not clearly separated. Furthermore, some of their family members had also migrated, which meant that the family was spatially distributed.

My informants suggested that families were important for practical support. In the literature, Curtin (1986) suggests that neighbourhood groups have become more important in day-to-day mutual help than kin. However, Donnan and McFarlane (1986) suggest that kin in rural areas in N.Ireland continue to be valued for many purposes. They are a source of information (for example, on jobs), of recruitment for business ventures and of practical aid. They co-operate in agriculture, are important for life-cycle occasions such as baptisms, marriages and funerals, and for day-to-day socialising. In an important sense they are seen positively as "your own" people, the writers suggest. However, their importance is, they agree, challenged today by neighbours and friends and can be cross-cut by class and religion.

The practical help of families was something my informants had valued in Ireland, but which they were no longer able to avail

themselves of so easily. The distance from Ireland meant that help in moving house, or fixing a leak, for example, was greatly restricted. As such help was seen as one of the major benefits of the family, its absence was experienced as loss. Friendships were a possible substitute in London (see Chapter 5) although this was not seen as their primary function.

Some informants had negative experiences of family, which contributed to their desire to leave. Family could be seen as restricting, embodying narrow attitudes to religion and cultural norms, putting pressure on visiting informants to attend church, for example. They could also be criticised for being insufficiently supportive. Some felt that while they were positive about their family at a distance, they would not wish to live close by as the amount of contact expected would be claustrophobic. The over-involvement of family was seen by one couple as a small-town feature, rather than intrinsically Irish.

Wallman is useful here. She suggests (1982:109) that kin are a resource: they can be assessed for the support they can offer according to where they live, what they are good at, what information, status, power and skills they have to offer. Thus, some families had more of what my informants needed than others.

Gray (1996:24-28) stresses the importance of familial relationships in Irish identity, suggesting that the families her female informants came from, or aspired to form, were a crucial component of their connection with Irishness. I would suggest that the identity which is formed in the family



contains ethnicity as one of its elements, but it includes more than this. Furthermore, family were important to my male as well as female informants.

Families are indeed the location of one's first learning about identity and, James suggests, (1998:143) a locus for the self. The idea of the family is, he continues,

"an important reference point for who we think we are":  
(ibid:142)

ties of blood and marriage locate us in the present social world, while generational ties link us to a collective past and future. My informants continued to identify themselves as they had learned to do within the family: even if it was through rejecting this learning and redefining themselves, the family role was the starting point from which they oriented themselves. For example, one woman complained of always being identified as her father's daughter in her home town, as her father was well known: "I'm myself and nobody else!" she insisted.

The form which the family takes in Ireland has been, and continues to be, affected by the economic situation, by religious mores, and today, by modern secular movements, such as feminism. It is also influenced by its location in rural/urban area and in North/Republic.

Developing this, the family, suggests Curtin, (1986:169) is a "crucial mediator and barometer of ... changes" in Irish society, dramatic since the 1960s. Thus, parent-child relations are in a "fluid state", with more emphasis on negotiation, rather than acting out "definite culturally prescribed positions". The elderly no longer live in the

family home, and the roles of husband and wife are also open to negotiation. Furthermore, the nuclear family is no longer venerated as much as immediately post-famine. James (1998:143) suggests that what the family is largely depends on what people think it is, even though rhetoric conveys it as solid. In other words, it can be much more flexible than it is portrayed as being. (Hirsche 1998:176-7)

Certainly, my informants did not tend to idealise their families; although they made valuing statements and family could be a major part of why they missed Ireland, they also criticised the restrictions of close family links. For many, the openness to negotiation of family roles which I refer to, felt far from sufficiently advanced. Of course, my informants were young, a stage when McFarlane notes they will hold a pro-  
friendship, anti-family stance. Moving to Britain, thus distancing themselves from their families, seemed to moderate this stance, as even those informants who were most negative about their families were more likely to exhibit ambivalence than outright rejection.

#### **PERSONAL FREEDOM & CHANGE**

Many informants stressed how claustrophobic they felt in Ireland. This was related to its small scale and parochial nature, whereby one's business could not remain private. "If you went a bid mad", Alan suggested,

"before you got to work the next day, everyone would know about it".

It was also related to cultural habits, such as "dropping-in" unannounced, which one couple complained felt intrusive. These experiences were contrasted with the anonymity of

London.

People used terms such as "small-mindedness" of Ireland and talked of feeling "oppressed", "hemmed in" and "restricted" by people's expectations.<sup>3</sup> Andrew highlighted the irony of James Joyce being claimed as a national hero when he was rejected and forced to leave Ireland during his lifetime for challenging the narrowness of Irish values. In Irish Women's conferences, discrimination against travellers was quoted as an example of narrow-mindedness. Lastly, several female informants told me they felt restricted by the expectation that they get married and have children. Thus Montague (1995) writing of the North as

"this narrowing world/of bigotry and anger",  
describes a world familiar to my informants.

Ireland was thus presented as a place where one was restricted by the expectations and values of the community, unlike London, where one could do what one wanted and not face censure. This is, of course, the obverse of the friendliness of Irish people, and the smaller size of Irish cities, which meant one could easily encounter people one knew. My informants could thus recall Ireland as friendly and warm on some occasions, and as restricting and claustrophobic on others. Likewise, London could be presented as positive because of the anonymity it offered, or as cold and unfriendly.

Both of these representations of Ireland were given weight and

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix 2 details the experiences of core informants in this regard.

value by my informants. I suggest that the friendliness and warmth was something which, like the beauty of the countryside, was appreciated more from a distance; while in Ireland, the restrictions were more palpable to my informants and contributed to their decision to migrate (see Chapter 4).

However, Ireland was and is a country undergoing fundamental changes, particularly in relation to this issue of personal freedom. My informants reported personal experience of this. On a micro level, family attitudes could change, with parents sometimes becoming more tolerant of non-attendance at Mass by their visiting offspring, for example. In terms of wider societal changes, attitudes to mixed marriage were seen by some to be changing, and one informant pointed out that church attendance was declining.

Legal and other changes affecting personal freedom have also occurred in the Republic. Recent legislation on homosexuality (see page 93) was a radical move. Smith suggests that this resulted from a desire to improve laws inherited from Britain, thus emphasizing independence. The toleration of gay communities has also increased in Dublin, in the arts, business and media worlds, and gay clubs and "out" public figures are more prominent. Information on abortion and on overseas services was approved in the Republic in 1983 and a constitutional amendment allowed a 16 year old rape victim to travel to England for an abortion. A 1992 referendum, however, retained the ban on abortion by a majority of 2:1, demonstrating the limits of public challenge. The reform of

divorce law has been more far-reaching. In November 1995, divorce was finally approved, although by less than 1%. (Gibbons 5/8/95)

Although this and other examples noted here post-dated my fieldwork, they represent the culmination of changes in attitude occurring during the fieldwork period. There is now much greater public questioning of the church:

"Irish society is moving on, leaving the church behind it",

suggests Gibbons. (Ibid)

Attitudes to politics in the Republic have also changed. In a pre-election opinion poll in 1987, only 3% of those interviewed spontaneously mentioned Northern Ireland as a major issue. (The Irish Times 28/11/87) Unemployment, taxation, prices, government finances, crime and vandalism were seen as more important. New parties in the Republic aimed to break the stranglehold of partition politics and political conflict has gradually moved from its traditional focus to a wider arena. Ruane and Todd (1998:240-241) suggest that this is through an increasingly external orientation towards international networks.

Related to these developments, the public sphere in the Republic is "much less pervaded by Catholic and nationalist symbols" (ibid:247) and there has been a move

"away from fixed notions of Irish culture to exploring what it could be or may be in process of becoming". (Ibid:237)

Ruane and Todd give the example of Irish soccer: once this was the symbol of all that was non-Irish, yet today the international team contains Irish and English players and is

taken to symbolise "the face of modern Ireland" and its world-wide spread of Irish people. Ryan (cited in Gray 1996:25) also suggests that a shifting focus from a political national identity to a cultural one is producing a more globalised sense of Irishness.

In education, changes are also afoot. The cultural and religious emphasis of Irish schools has lessened to include other norms, such as economic self-interest. This was reflected in the numbers of students taking science, business and technical subjects. (Clancy 1986:118) These far-reaching changes have an impact on self-identity and self-esteem.

I shall now consider why these changes in the Republic have come about. Phádraig proposes that this is partly due to the introduction of national television in 1962 and its broadening influence. She also suggests that a number of late twentieth century movements have encouraged greater awareness of pluralism, and of alternative philosophies. Violent republicanism is one, offering a highly charged and principled alternative to church sanctity, and feminism has also attacked the church for its sexism.

An increasing emphasis on the individual, furthermore, also seen in Britain, means more emphasis on individual conscience and less respect shown to Catholic prelates. (Murphy 1988) The focus on individual conscience reflects the ethics of Protestantism, which may come from the increasing confidence of the Catholic State, no longer beleaguered by Protestant planters.

This growing confidence provides another reason for increasing criticism of the church. In the past, repressive anti-Catholic laws (the Penal Laws) heightened emotional attachment to Catholicism. Religious freedom, paradoxically, brought with it the freedom to reject aspects of the faith. So, while Catholicism's repression by the English in the past produced loyalty to it in the present, gradually, as confidence grew in the independent Catholic State, criticism also became possible. This has led to the ability to see and attack corruption and to challenge previously accepted dogma, where this is no longer tantamount to "ethnic betrayal".

Lastly, there is an economic influence. Church teaching has traditionally been unchallenged in Ireland partly because the moral system, requiring emphasis on the sanctity of the family, could be linked to economic concerns, particularly those of peasant farming, with its high labour needs. Changes in the economic system produced by modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation assisted the re-evaluation of moral systems, whose economic function was partly removed.

Urbanisation has, indeed, been very significant in the Republic. Redlich suggests that

"the outstanding demographic phenomenon of our time has been the change-over on a vast scale from a rural to an urban way of life". (1978:83-4)

Due to these changes, the traditional image of Ireland as an agricultural, slower-paced, somewhat whimsical country, or as Heaney puts it,

"a mythologically grounded and emotionally contoured island that belongs in art time, in story time, in the

continuous present of a common, unthinking memory-life", must be balanced by a recognition of today's Republic as "a country of conference hotels, computer printouts, fax .. property deals and stereophonic discos". (1990:23) that is, increasingly industrialised, urbanised and "modern". (See Appendix 7.)

The ideological values accompanying these developments have a geographical spread. Pringle (1989:43-4) and Smith (8/2/94) suggest that they are located in the East, although Pringle's view is that they are spreading westwards. A conflict can be identified between the "traditional" ideology, closely related to church values, and new urban values with their concomitant new lifestyles and ideas. The persistence of "traditional" views as the dominant ideology in the rural West connects, I suggest, with a tendency to represent it as "the real Ireland", the story-book Ireland referred to above. This can be seen in Joyce's story, "The Dead", (1977) where the love hero comes from Galway, in the romantic west, and is also located in the past, somewhat like the west of Ireland.

In this way, traditions can be continued in a part of Ireland, and perhaps idealised by the majority, or by those who leave, as the "real" Ireland; yet this Ireland is no longer desirable in practice. This shows one strategy for dealing with a conflict of values brought about by the process of modernisation.

The North, however, showed fewer signs of change at the time of fieldwork, despite the evidence of modernisation and feminism within its boundaries. I suggest that this was a direct result of the preoccupation with "the Troubles", which



has meant that the energy to press for unrelated changes has been diminished. The North has not experienced the stability enjoyed by the Republic, which allows the questioning of deeply held beliefs and practices. Instead, both Northern communities have battled to defend their religious doctrines against a perceived enemy.

In these circumstances, questioning doctrines would be perceived as undermining one's own religious community and, thus, giving ammunition to the 'other'. In fact, in a situation where both communities wish to retain the moral high ground, suggesting a diluting of principles would be seen as providing damaging propaganda material. So, while Protestants portrayed the Republic as dominated by the Catholic church and its doctrines, ironically, the situation has developed where the North is perhaps more dominated by church teaching, both Protestant and Catholic, than its Catholic neighbour.

However, post-fieldwork, a new power-sharing Assembly has been established in Northern Ireland, in 1999. This represents a profound change, and if successful, the consequences will be far-reaching. They are likely to include greater freedom of individual expression, as enduring peace will promote a greater sense of security and safety, thus enabling challenges which would previously have been considered inappropriate or dangerous.

To conclude, Ireland is a country which is undergoing fundamental changes. Attitudes are changing, regarding politico-religious divisions, and gender; forces of modernisation are apparent in the economy, together with

increasing secularisation; there has been a shift from solidary groups with fixed patterns of inheritance, to a more individual and loosely organised focus. Reform is the result of gradual movement in public opinion and increasing personal and public ability to challenge church teaching.

During my informants' time in Ireland, this would only have been beginning, with fewer results evident, but it would, nonetheless, have been significant. As these changes continue, they will affect the reasons for migration, as one will not need to leave Ireland to achieve the freedom to express and act on views which are not sanctioned by the church. It will be interesting to see whether migration in the future falls, or if reasons for it merely change.

Even now, my informants are products of these experiences. They have left an Ireland which is in many respects in flux, and their sense of identity (ethnic and other) is affected by this. Irish identities in Ireland are changing to integrate new values and lifestyles but the old identities remain to challenge them. It is the older values which my informants perceived as restrictive. The challenge and change which has begun demonstrates the growth of a movement rejecting these old, previously acceptable boundaries and limitations. This movement is also located inside my informants, but their contribution has been to leave, to discover something else, rather than create something new within Ireland. I will now look at how my informants imagined and anticipated London while in Ireland, and consider their first steps in their new country.

## CHAPTER 4

### NEW ARRIVALS

In this chapter, I look at the reasons why my informants emigrated and consider their expectations of London, issues which will have been relevant while they were still resident in Ireland. I suggest that my informants have largely emigrated for non-economic purposes and that overall, they did so in order to pursue issues relating to their own self-development. I consider how such an individual agenda conflicts with communal, ethnic norms, and suggest that the act of migration, while in one sense embodying this dilemma, in another, partially resolves it.

My informants had few expectations. This related to their choice of destination and its familiarity, and was also likely to reflect a desire to avoid disappointment. The changing nature of Irish migration also contributed, as it is now, I suggest, much more likely to be short-term, and conceptualised as such.

The third section in this chapter concerns my informants' initial experiences in London, making this a transitional chapter, bridging the old and the new. As these experiences were often negative, I suggest that disappointment was not, in fact, avoided. I look at the two most pressing problems facing the migrant in this new world, work and accommodation and the networks my informants used for establishing themselves regarding these. I suggest that ethnic networks were valued in the search for accommodation, although not, on the whole, significant for work. Their main value, however,

was their familiarity.

#### **WHY MIGRATE?**

Reasons for migration can be analyzed at the level of structural and historical circumstance or the "micro-subjective level", that is focusing on the actors' own reasons. (Al-Rasheed 1995:17) I have looked at the structural conditions affecting migration in Chapter 1. However, I suggest that these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. My informants were aware of how social structural forces, such as economic and political factors, impacted on them. Thus, while I wish to privilege their perspectives in this chapter, and I begin with their views, wider (structural) issues likewise impinge on my analysis. This is as a result of my informants' prompting, and also through my own reading of the information they presented.

In assessing the reasons for migration, as well as looking beyond what my informants say, to wider, structural factors, I am also probing beneath their words. The issue of individual motivation is clearly a complex one, and like identity, not entirely conscious. My informants were, to a limited extent, aware that their motivations could be unconscious, sometimes recognising that the motives they originally thought they had, were not as important as others they now recognised were paramount. I will consider this difficult issue below.

As I indicate in Chapter 1, a preoccupation of traditional migration theory has been its emphasis on the economic impetus to migrate. This has been the case for studies of Irish and world-wide migration. Ruane and Todd suggest that economic

inequality

"carries with it vital material, symbolic and strategic meanings", (1998:175)

a useful reminder of the reverberation of economic reality. However, I have already indicated my dissatisfaction with economic reductionism on the subject of migrant motivation. I shall demonstrate that my informants had other, non-economic motivations, and that even where an economic motive was expressed, this tended to inter-relate with other factors.

To start with the most extreme kind of economic explanation, that which holds that migration is "forced" by economic necessity, I found that two informants used this term to me. However, when this was pursued, it became evident that the picture was more complicated than they at first indicated.

Deirdre was one of these. Despite talking of her migration being forced, she also described her experience as follows: she travelled from her native Donegal to college in Dublin, returning to teach in Donegal for a year. This was, she told me, because a job came up which meant she had no excuse to leave. She spent this year, however, constantly looking forward to getting away, as her friends had migrated, she was bored, and there was nothing to do. Her motives, therefore, included significant non-economic factors: boredom, wanting to meet new friends and have new experiences.

Tony, secondly, described his migration to college in London as "forced" because he had not obtained high enough grades to ensure acceptance at a college in Dublin, and the only other

grant-aided place he could obtain was in London. However, he noted that if he had worked harder he could have raised his grades, but simply had not cared enough. He also pointed out that he had compensation money from an earlier accident and could thus have funded himself to stay in Dublin if this had been sufficiently important to him. Additionally, as his mother was English, he had made frequent trips to London as a child and consequently knew what it was like. His sister and uncle were living in London, which were other incentives, and his mother ran an antiques business and rented a flat there. These two examples show an awareness of other factors relevant to the decision to migrate, even for those informants who described their migration initially as economically "forced".

Although only two people referred to emigration in this way, initial questioning of other informants on this subject commonly produced an answer which emphasized the importance of finding a job. However, my informants were much more likely to emphasize obtaining a more interesting job, or furthering a career, rather than just wanting to get any job. One man said about Ireland: "it's a nice place to live and all that", but that to find, "something challenging and interesting and prosperous", the "path" he wanted for his life, he had to leave. This implied a reference to a lucrative career, but also indicated a degree of choice which related to the broader desire for self-development. Similarly, Tony's choice of college demonstrated a desire for self-improvement, as well as leading to more interesting career possibilities. This goes

well beyond the idea of emigration as necessitated and controlled by economic survival.

Furthermore, in the course of prolonged conversation, other, non-economic reasons were almost always described by my informants, usually without any probing on my part. Reasons cited related to dissatisfaction in Ireland. Women from the Republic were most likely to mention socio-religious restrictions as an impetus to leave. Divorce and abortion legislation and restrictions on contraception were experienced as unacceptably constraining by many, as I have shown. Popular and religious opposition to homosexuality also stimulated departures among gay men and lesbians (despite later, favourable legislative change). One lesbian told me she left the Republic,

"to get my head together after the nuns",

a comment responded to with rueful nods by fellow lesbians. The religious restrictions on personal freedom characteristic of a state heavily influenced by a conservative Catholic church were thus experienced as an incentive to migrate by a large number of women from the Republic.

Although these restrictions apply also in Northern Ireland, as I note in Chapter 3, Northern Irish migrants did not tend to cite them as part of their motivation for leaving. Religion was, however, an incentive to leave for another reason, namely, the conflict attaching to it. This encompassed violence, and also the wider, accompanying attitudes of tension and mutual hostility. Some Northerners in religiously mixed relationships were particularly sensitive to these

issues.

"Claustrophobia" was a word cited often by informants from both North and South. This could relate to a number of issues: socio-religious restrictions as above; the perceived predictability of religious and political rhetoric in the North; the parochial nature of the home environment and the sense of everyone knowing one's business; or the proximity of family and their expectations. From all these perspectives, "claustrophobia", as I indicate in Chapter 3, prompted migration.

These reasons relate to dissatisfaction with personal situations in Ireland, providing what could be described as 'push' factors. Another, less individual factor, which could encourage people to leave was the fact that emigration from Ireland was such a well-established tradition, as I show in Chapter 1. When Deirdre, above, described how all her friends had gone, rendering life at home boring, she was describing the personal impact of this phenomenon. Another informant, Breda, suggested that while in England people wonder about what job they will do, in Ireland, they wonder where they will emigrate to; she noted that this had been a large part of her reality. Again, Caroline spoke of early memories of her mother's sisters visiting Ireland. Several members of her mother's family of 13 had emigrated, and when they visited, there was always much celebration, she said, which she remembered with great fondness.

This weaving of the experience of emigration into early and later life experience in Ireland prompted acceptance of it as



a viable, indeed, popular alternative. This combined with the practical results of widespread emigration, such as the missing friends Deirdre lamented, to provide a compelling stimulus to leave.

The importance of emigration being established as a norm in Irish society was emphasized only by informants from the Republic, and was also referred to more frequently by women than men. The issue tended to be connected with politics, as the Irish government was held responsible for encouraging migration in order to prop up the economy, and then for abandoning its migrants by not funding support structures for them in their host countries. Those informants who demonstrated a self-conscious focusing on emigration-as-norm in Irish society, tended to correspondingly disapprove of the government of the Republic for fostering continued emigration. (See Chapter 10.) They then connected this with the notion that emigration was "forced". This is an interesting development, as prior to independence, blame would have been clearly attached to the English government's economic policies and exploitation of Ireland. I return to this issue later.

On the question of why fewer men stressed this point, one can speculate that my male informants preferred to see themselves less as the passive victims of government policy and established pattern, and more in charge of their own destiny. This would be in accordance with the emphasis on male role as breadwinner and do-er, which is characteristic of Irish society. However, not having pursued this issue with my male

informants, I can only offer speculation.

In addition to the factors listed above, there were specific and individual reasons cited for leaving. These tended to be expressed to me more by women than by men. Again, this may relate to gender roles, where women are, stereotypically, more likely to talk about personal feelings and situations than men; it may also relate to my being female. One woman commented that she had moved from Tralee to Dublin to nurse her mother during illness, and after her mother's death, new possibilities were opened up. Another, Caroline, confided after a long period that the real reason she had moved was to escape the sexual abuse of a male relative. This may have indicated the desire for an emotional rather than practical escape, as the abuse had, I believe, ceased by this point, due to her already having left the family home where it had taken place.

Intimate, personal reasons were thus profoundly influential for some informants and these, only two of many examples, help us to remember that the precise configuration of each informant's personal situation was different; although there were themes emerging which were stressed by a number of informants, idiosyncrasies applied to each individual case which made each combination of factors involved quite unique. This does not mean that general points can not be made, or that an attempt to offer a migrant profile is valueless, but merely reminds us that the particulars of each case are richly various.

I found that my informants were much more likely to express their dissatisfaction with Ireland or emphasize how "normal" it was to emigrate, than they were to detail what had drawn

them to London specifically. Many did, however, suggest that "curiosity" motivated them, and the desire to try something new. Importantly, London was also perceived as offering increased personal freedom, owing to its size as well as its ethos. This produced a greater sense of space in which to express oneself, an ideal which my informants aspired to. London's proximity and familiarity through the media were also stressed. On the whole, however, it did not seem to be portrayed as the source of all my informants' hopes, although this might seem to be implied by the action of moving there.

Some informants claimed that they were in London by accident. One man had gone to London en route to a job in Holland; when this job fell through, he stayed in London, planning to save money in order to move to Holland independently. Ten years later, Seán was still in London. Another, Stephen, had applied for a job with a company in London, together with his wife, as it involved a paid air fare over to London, and, they felt, an opportunity for a free holiday (albeit brief). Ultimately, so many people were interested, the company sent people over to Ireland to interview, he said, but although the original reason was gone, they decided to continue with the process, and both ended up working with the company in America, and later in London. Obviously, Stephen's interest in London was already there, but the haphazardness of the experience is worth noting; it can, perhaps, concur with the sense that London was not idealised by my informants, either as the perfect rescue from a dissatisfying situation in

Ireland, or as, simply, the perfect place to live one's life.

The above stories illustrate something of the complexities of motivation itself. These can be couched in terms of conscious and unconscious or primary and subordinate motivation. Primary and subordinate motivation could be easily expressed by my informants as these relate to distinctions in terms of importance which can be quite consciously held. The distinction between conscious and unconscious motivation was not necessarily acknowledged by them. Their attitude to their own motives was, however, presented, in some cases, as changing over time: that is, what they thought had prompted migration was superseded by a growing sense of another, more compelling motive. Rather than seeing the first motive as erroneous, I suggest it is more appropriate to understand this in terms of conscious and unconscious levels of motivation. A more superficial motive is thus supplemented by an understanding of a deeper prompting, which was not acknowledged as important at the time.

For example, Sheila informed me that she had left Ireland because she felt claustrophobic about the politics and religion. Some years later she told me she realised that what she had tried to escape was in fact her own inner religious turmoil. For other informants, changes in their attitudes to why they migrated happened as they talked to me, realising the situation was more complicated, with more factors, than they had initially felt. In these cases, the degree of consciousness increased with the act of involvement in my

research.

Awareness that motivation may not always be consciously understood at the time by my informants affected how I attempted to understand this issue. It is important to respect what one's informants say, but equally important to be able to move beyond or underneath their words for a fuller understanding. Thus, my interpretation of my informants' motivation, while taking into account their own suggestions, also goes beyond these. It does this by reaching more deeply than some of my informants were interested in doing, but also by looking more widely, comparing the range of responses and seeing what they had in common. As a result of considering these factors, what is my understanding of why my informants migrated?

I suggest my informants migrated as part of an internal journey of self-development. The details of each journey varied according to individual goals and desires, but my informants shared the desire to further these goals in a process of self-discovery and self-expansion. One woman suggested to me that the really significant thing about migration and the reason why everyone should experience it, was that it "broadened your horizons". This is reminiscent of the "grand tour" of the British bourgeoisie and of Australian and New Zealand back-packers' travels today.

It is this broadening of horizons which was implicit in the way that other informants talked about their decision to migrate. They felt to varying degrees stifled by their situations in Ireland, and correspondingly, keen to experience

something new. They did not come to London thinking it was the answer to all their problems in Ireland, but in order to live a different way and find out what it was like, and also to find out what they could be like. They did not come hoping to find the streets paved with gold in an economic sense, but they did come to find the fortune within, to expand and develop as people. That this might include finding a lucrative and fulfilling career path did not mean that earning money was their main objective, although of course, some would have been more motivated by this than others.

Is this quest for individual freedom and development a new feature of Irish migration or has it always been there, but simply been masked by arguments of economic reductionism? I suggest that the economic focus has never been an adequate explanation. Even the Great Famine, perhaps the ultimate economic motivator, can be seen as a catalyst for other forces, (Swift 1990:8) rather than a factor which removed people's choices, and forced them to leave. Even in extreme hardship, people can still make informed choices.

Today, the increased contemporary levels of professional migration, both world-wide and from Ireland, present us with migrants who have educational and other resources, who have an increased level of control over their lives, and to whom greater numbers of choices are open. The changes I have described within Ireland as well as on a world-wide level have opened up the possibility of people choosing to migrate to improve their situation in more ways than simply economically.

Furthermore, as I have indicated in Chapter 1, a combination of factors render London a destination where self-development can continue without anything like the same level of communal sanction which was experienced in Ireland. This is, I suggest, more than anything else, what my informants desire, and both the situation and the desire are, I re-iterate, a product of the times.

It remains necessary to examine why an emphasis on economic motivation persists among my informants, when further questioning revealed the limitations of its relevance. I suggest a number of reasons. Firstly, answering in terms of economics was a short-hand for what was in fact a very complex question. I got the sense that this answer was designed to satisfy the questioner by giving the answer which was expected, and thus to close the subject. Over the course of my fieldwork, I often watched other people question migrants on their reasons for leaving and I noticed that responses in terms of jobs were always accepted immediately. Furthermore, the question was quite often phrased in a way which suggested the answer to be economic: "I suppose it was because of the job situation that you came over then...?" being a typical example of this. In these circumstances, it was simply easier to assent to popular expectations, which could thus be seen to match the traditional theoretical emphasis.

Secondly, it is worth remembering that economic fulfilment is an important part of the picture: having broadened horizons is only desirable and sustaining while one has sufficient economic resources to ensure that one's survival is not in

jeopardy. This being the case, however, as it was for all of my professional informants, migrants are freed to consider other, psychological or spiritual considerations to do with their own inner growth. This is, of course, a peculiarly modern concept. The economic answer is thus a kind of shorthand, one which may indicate the beginnings of the migrant's motivation, but certainly not the end of it.

Thirdly, Miller has suggested that the reason why economic motivation for migration is stressed among Irish migrants themselves is rooted in Irish culture. He suggests that traditional Gaelic culture has tended to devalue individual action, ambition and personal responsibility, in favour of

"passive or communal values such as duty, continuity, and conformity". (1990:93)

Mass emigration thus provided a serious challenge to the central values of this culture, one which was resolved by State, Church and migrants themselves portraying it as "exile", "forced" by economic necessity, rather than consciously chosen as an opportunity for self-improvement on the part of the individual migrant.

This 'forcing' was seen as a direct result of English economic policies and exploitation, and meant that blame could be placed squarely on an outside party. It entirely absolved the individual Irish migrant, and indeed Irish society, from any responsibility or culpability. To appeal to economic motivation was thus, for the Irish migrant, the traditional way of understanding and explaining migration, both to themselves and to others.

By contrast, Scully (1994:94-5) suggests that today's Irish



State emphasizes that emigration takes place for reasons of individual choice; this, she continues, is in order to justify migration's continuation, as the State has come to rely on it economically. Such a response represents an about-turn for a government which can no longer simply blame British imperialism for its economic woes.

My informants do not, in the main, seem to feel guilty or ambivalent about being migrants: they remain in contact with "home", through frequent visits and the telephone; they have not been away long; and they have not settled in London to the extent of having established families here. They can thus keep open the possibility of return, and indeed a number of informants did return to live in Ireland.

However, a few did feel a more complex ambivalence. For example, Elizabeth and Deirdre each had an ongoing dilemma about whether to settle in London or return home to live (see Chapter 5 and Appendix 2). A few female informants also expressed guilt about having left their families. This was also the context in which Elizabeth's dilemma was expressed. Therefore, the guilt that some, female informants felt, was related specifically to family issues, rather than to leaving Ireland itself.

Considering my own response, while my first reaction was that I did not feel any guilt about having migrated, on reflection, I realised that each time I have visited home, I have found it painful to leave my family behind. This reaction is likely to include an element of guilt, corresponding to my female informants' reactions; however, I found it difficult to

acknowledge the possibility of guilt as it conflicts with my aspiration to be independent. It may be that such a conflict was shared by my informants, rendering them similarly disinclined to emphasize guilt, even if it existed for them. This reaction may also be more common among women due to the expectations that they will remain close to their families. (In my experience, sons are not expected to do this to the same extent.)

This possibility, of the wider relevance of the experience of guilt, although speculative, should not be discounted. Partly for this reason, but also because my informants explicitly emphasized the restriction of communal values which Miller refers to, I will now consider his proposals in some detail. I shall focus on the communal values he and my informants have highlighted.

For Miller, the tendency to favour communal values is rooted in "culture", whereas I suggest it is intimately related to religion in particular. (The extent to which religion equals culture in Northern Ireland is, of course, a contentious issue.) After all, the Protestant world view emphasizes individual conscience to a much greater degree than Catholicism. In Northern Ireland, I suggest that what begins as a Protestant religious ideal crosses the religious divide, becoming a shared cultural value. This happens because Catholics are inevitably influenced by their Protestant neighbours, despite an ideology (and practice) of separation.

Does this mean that the communal, traditionally Gaelic values

Miller describes are absent in the North? I suggest not. Catholicism has also influenced Protestantism here, and Protestantism, besides, is not characterised solely by its individualistic emphasis. Tom Paulin, a Northern Irish, Protestant poet, expresses, in "Desertmartin", the view that Protestant, individualistic leanings have submitted to communal obedience. He laments how Presbyterianism, in particular, has limited its own freedom:

"a free strenuous spirit changes  
To a servile defiance that whines and shrieks  
For the bondage of the letter". (1986:354)

While this is one man's perspective, communal, family, state and religious values can indeed be seen to restrict behaviour for both religious communities in the North. The situation here is thus more complicated than Miller's thesis, exhibiting a tension between individual expression - validated as the religious ideal of the majority, and progressing into a wider cultural expression - and communal duty, also integrated into religious and social ideals and norms in both communities.

In the predominantly Catholic Republic, does Miller's description fit more closely? It is true that the absence of Protestantism's individualistic emphasis affects the situation. However, the Catholic ethos in the Republic is changing. Increasing secularisation means the need to justify oneself according to the values of the Church is reduced, and radical groups, such as feminists, openly challenge the Church's influence on state matters.

Furthermore, Europeanisation, a process eagerly embraced by

the government and people, means that Gaelic culture is open to other ideas; it also means the Irish can be less focused on Irish-British hostilities. This, together with increasing confidence in independence, has led to a more relaxed attitude to migrants leaving for England or other parts of Europe, with England now being seen in a European context. When a scapegoat is sought on which to place blame for Irish emigration, it is now more likely to be found in the Irish, rather than the British government.

However, this illustrates that the need to place blame is still relevant, which points to the continuing influence of old ways of thinking, even though they are gradually being replaced. In the Republic, like the North, there is thus a tension between the value systems of individualism and communal loyalty, although here it is produced by the development of modernising influences, rather than being inherent in socio-religious structures. Again, Miller's description is of partial value, but does not reveal the whole story.

The conflict I have described for both parts of Ireland can be understood in terms of dialectical process. In the North, the emphasis on individual conscience as a fundamental ideal of Protestantism can be seen as the thesis in this process. The antithesis to this individualistic drive is the strong emphasis on familial, religious and social conformity, where the norms governing group behaviour are powerfully constraining. This tendency is present in Protestantism, but more powerfully so in Gaelic, Catholic culture, as Miller

describes. The tension between individualism and communal duty is thus partially a Protestant-Catholic conflict, but this is mediated by the fact that modernising forces affect Catholics in Northern Ireland, as indeed conservative, communal forces within Protestantism affect Protestants. The dialectical conflict is thus, in a sense, shared by both religious groups, although the location of what I have called the thesis and antithesis is unequally held between them.

This conflict can be lived with, in an uneasy vacillation between the conflicting values, or it can be resolved in a synthesis of these views, completing the dialectical process. Migration can, among its other meanings, represent a possible synthesis of the two opposing strands: migrants express their individuality by leaving Ireland and striking out alone in a country where social constraints are looser (England); however, insofar as migration is an established norm in Ireland, simply something Irish people 'do', they are also expressing something more communal, in a culturally sanctioned form of recognisably Irish behaviour. The two opposing strands are thus merged in the action of migration.

In the Republic, the conflict of values differs from the North. Here, communal values and duties are challenged, not by an alternative religious perspective, but by the forces of modernity, which undermine previously accepted communal values. If the thesis in this case is represented by the communal values of religious and social duty, what is the antithesis?

I suggest that in the Republic, the issue is, in fact, how to define Irishness, and what form religious and social duty should take: how much loyalty is expected? Should it include hostility towards the traditional British enemy? These are examples of fundamental questions being worked through in the Republic on all sorts of levels, from individual to state. The antithesis is thus a systematic deconstruction of cultural shibboleths.

While the uncovering of a new 'ethnicity' would represent the synthesis of these two forces, and correspond with Ryan's suggestion (cited in Gray 1996) that a more globalised Irishness is developing, migration can be seen as another possible synthesis here. Again, the act of migration expresses a communal norm, but in re-assessing the reasons behind it and the meaning of the move to allow for individual development, today's migrant is challenging old assumptions which view the Irish migrant as a victim of British imperialism and oppression, forced, paradoxically, to travel to the enemy to survive. Migration today thus has a different meaning, one which synthesises conflicting forces at work in the Republic.

I am reminded of a paper by Séamus Heaney. (1990:25) Writing on Irish culture, he describes an apocryphal incident concerning two Cork school boys who are under suspicion of copying. To find out who is the culprit, the teacher sits them together to write a piece on swallows. Almost immediately, the boys are separated, and the culprit is revealed through his first sentence: having half copied it and

been forced to complete it in his own words, the boy has written: "the swallow is a migratory bird; he have a roundy head".

The combination of the articulate, received English copied from the other pupil, who has remembered the lessons in his text book, and the dialect Irish which expresses the boy's own understanding of the subject, reveals two different kinds of truth about the swallow. One is expressed in a more "educated" fashion, but the other is no less valid for being idiomatic.

Similarly, the Irish migrant can speak in her own idiom (my informants being educated people, this means in a highly articular manner) and this vision is part of the truth. The anthropologist's theories provide another, more academic, way of talking about migration. My hope is that both understandings can supplement each other. There are many levels of explanation and understanding which apply to the migration situation, from structural forces in society, down to intimate, personal details. I suggest that it is possible to embrace all of these, recognising that the human beings they describe are complex creatures, who create and experience meaning on many levels themselves.

I shall focus next on one specific component of the decision to migrate, namely, expectations held of the new environment.

#### **EXPECTATIONS**

When enquiring about my informants' expectations of London, I was repeatedly greeted with vague disclaimers, as they told me that they had not had any. These statements were not made

with any great conviction. Rather, my informants had to think about the question, and when unable to remember having had any expectations, would often react with surprise to this discovery. Such forgetfulness could relate to the passage of time, except that memories of initial experiences in London tended to be much more vividly etched in their minds.

My informants themselves stressed Britain's familiarity through daily media images and stories. Such media representation had been experienced by all of them and was, I suggest crucial: seeing images of London and Britain on the news, imagination is replaced by a repertoire of factually correct images; hearing or reading stories of events there means one can recognise the pattern of daily life. Other reasons for familiarity which my informants cited were previous visits they had made, and contact with family or friends living there. These factors were partly seen as an impetus to migrate there, and partly used to explain their failure to ascend imaginative heights prior to arriving.

The proximity of London was another factor cited by informants. As a result of this, the decision to migrate could be seen as a temporary one, as moving back, or on to somewhere else, would be comparatively simple. This again would reduce the heights of expectations.

In fact, in planning to move to London, I found that my informants were not regarding this as a decision for life, but as a stage, to discover something new and move on. Some stated their plan to return to Ireland. Others did return while I knew them. This did not appear to be stigmatised with



failure, as for previous generations. Indeed, a government campaign to entice emigrants to return to Northern Ireland was reported in 1995. (Pilkington 11/10/95) Thus, I suggest that the expectation and meaning of migration have changed, from something final, where one is expected to succeed and stay away, to a more short-term expectation, where one moves away and experiences life elsewhere, and eventually, may return.

A further reason why the experience might be seen as more routine, is the fact that migration is so well established in Irish society. Related to this is the extent to which my informants have already migrated before coming to London. Jackson (1969) suggests that we make migratory movements throughout our lives, from cradle to bed, to school and beyond. To this extent, such movement is 'normal', although not less stressful for that, I suggest. However, to leave the family home for the first time to go to London would certainly make the experience more striking than to add one more move to a series; the former would be more likely to produce imaginative expectation.

Most of my informants had previously moved, however, either within Ireland, or abroad. Moving within Ireland should not be discounted, as the transition from a rural to an urban location is a major one, even within the same country. Migrations abroad included America, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, and Wales. My informants were thus accustomed to movement and change, having made such choices before, and for some, London would have been more familiar than their previous

destinations.

Nonetheless, I would expect some hope and optimism to accompany the decision to move: if one were not expecting something good, one would simply not move. Initial experiences were described as so negative, as I will show below, that hopes of something better were obviously held. Therefore, I suggest that in addition to the reasons I have outlined, my informants down-played the importance of the move to themselves in order to reduce anxiety. An experience which could promise hope could, after all, also threaten disappointment. My informants could therefore use the fact of proximity to suggest ease of return to themselves, thus lessening the pressure to succeed. This conveys the down-playing of hope partly as a defence and coping mechanism.

My informants may also have felt uncomfortable emphasizing hope which related to aspirations of self-development due to a residual guilt about the acceptability of this, given the communal emphasis of Irish culture referred to above. This would provide further impetus to down-play it to themselves. Lastly, they may have found uncovering their expectations to me too personal or embarrassing, perhaps considering them naïve.

Thus, I suggest my informants responded to a variety of factors: the relatively commonplace nature of emigration; the familiarity of the destination and its proximity; the need to dampen anxiety; and a discomfort with appearing too enthusiastic. These all combined to produce a reduced sense

of hope and expectation. Although a desire not to appear foolish to me may have contributed, I believe my informants actually felt less of these things, rather than consciously feeling, yet denying them. If they were dissembling to me, I think their disclaimers would have been more passionate. Overall, I suggest that London and Britain were perceived by my informants as not particularly alien, not particularly distant, and not particularly final, and that these experiences were heightened by psychological coping mechanisms which rendered them helpful.

#### **INITIAL EXPERIENCES**

"You always hope.. the place you're going to is going to turn out to be wonderful and beautiful.. and then you find, maybe, that the things that are there, you cannot integrate with them, because they're in great conflict to what you've been brought up with".

This statement reveals a rare (retrospective) expression of optimism prior to departure, but also illustrates a much more common experience of difficulty following arrival in London. Despite it having felt familiar, accessible and desirable to the majority of my informants before they left, initial experiences were often of shock.

Thus, my informants described a range of negative experiences. Public transport, in particular the underground system, crowds, and pollution were highlighted, suggesting that these aspects of the environment in the city were not ones my informants fully embraced in their expectations, despite their relative predictability. Elizabeth told me,

"I found the underground harrowing and the traffic.. frightening. ... Pollution as well".

To expect something is of course very different from

experiencing the impact of it in person. Even the size of the city could be a shock. One man described how the Virgin megastore on Oxford street rendered his local record shop laughably tiny, to illustrate what a different world London provided. For him, London's size was somewhat overwhelming.

For some informants, negative initial experiences related to the people in London. This could be due to the cosmopolitan nature of London, which came as a shock for some: the range of other cultures and ethnic groups was new to my informants, and meeting gay people for the first time, or discovering how openly couples lived together without being married could also be startling. Even where these experiences were not disapproved of, coming up against them in actuality was experienced as rather disorienting.

The unfriendliness of the people in London was also highlighted. My informants, on the whole, found it difficult to meet friends, and men drew attention to different socialising habits in London. It was no longer possible to walk into a pub and chat to the locals, as people preserved their space more carefully. Some informants found Irish jokes and teasing unexpectedly prevalent and difficult to deal with. A sense of alienation was thus reported by many informants as they looked back on their initial period and England was frequently perceived as less familiar and predictable than had been expected.

London could also be less than was expected. When I asked Elizabeth if London was what she anticipated, she told me:

"It wasn't quite as exciting, perhaps. I had over-estimated. I didn't realise that the theatres and cinemas cost so much and they were only rare treats".

Of course, an important point about first impressions, is that they may change. Alan, hearing a new migrant complain about the noise, dirt, travelling and loneliness of London, told him that everyone thought like that at the beginning, but after a few months,

"you wonder how you ever felt that way and don't mind it any more".

Certainly, for most of my informants, even those who did not have a very unhappy initial experience, there was an experience of some let-down, as London did not deliver what was hoped for. This is despite the emphasis on lack of hopes or expectations, and shows that my informants are likely to have invested more in the move than they were conscious of, as I indicate above. It was when talking about their actual experiences, rather than their expectations, that expectations in fact became explicit, through their not being fulfilled.

However, positive views were also expressed. "It has its compensations", Elizabeth told me, citing the tourist venues she had enjoyed exploring. A number of informants described a holiday feeling, or a sense of unreality about their initial period. This could be connected with temporary stay in a hostel, where they were not responsible for catering or provisioning, as would be the case in their own home; they were thus freer to site-see, which they enjoyed. Some praised the anonymity of the city, the other side of which was also perceived as unfriendliness; however, this tended to be

appreciated more over time than at the beginning, as it became balanced by an established social life. To a limited extent, for some informants, certain hopes were, therefore, fulfilled. For a few, this was simply London being, in fact, what they expected.

At a London Irish Women's Annual Conference, it was suggested that Irish people emigrate singly and without support. I found that most of my informants emigrated alone, although some had family or friends already in London. I shall now look briefly at the initial networks my informants used in the areas of accommodation and work.

In the search for accommodation, those informants who had family and friends in London turned first to these. Irish networks were therefore used in that these were the first people to be sought out. For those who did not have the benefit of this option, some turned to Irish organisations for help. One woman obtained an address of a hostel from the Camden Irish Centre; another chose an Irish teachers hostel to begin her stay.

Irish routes were not the only ones which were chosen, however. Some informants used religious networks. These could range from staying in a Methodist hostel for one Northern Irish Protestant woman, to consulting a parish priest for help, for another Catholic man from the Republic. Others chose to settle initially in a known area, discovered through a previous visit, for example. Overall, hostels were the most popular way to begin life in London for those who did not have contacts already living there, as they provided a base from

which a flat could be sought and a good way to make friends; these hostels could be Irish, religious, or neither.

In short, my informants were interested in choosing a route which had an element of the known or familiar. This could be through Irish friends or contacts, Irish organisations, religious organisations, or simply through choosing a known area. Shared ethnicity was thus only one option and was valued initially for its familiarity above all else. However, my informants had also chosen to come to London to experience something new. It was notable that no informants chose to settle in Kilburn, the most well known Irish location in London. Their desire for familiarity did not thus extend to being surrounded by Irish people to such a large extent.

Often my informants had jobs arranged before they came to London. If not, the usual routes were taken to find work, through papers and job centres, and occasionally personal contacts. Some informants were gaining work experience in order to return to a family business in Ireland, but most did not receive help from family and friends in obtaining work in London. Here, they had to 'go it alone', a major part, I suggest, of London's appeal, as well as its challenge.

None seemed to have endured unemployment for any length of time. To avoid this, some started further down the ladder by obtaining work which was beneath their capabilities or education, and worked their way up to a position of greater responsibility; some began with temporary work, either in an office or teaching environment. Martin described his first day in his first (office) job in London, as a teenager, newly

arrived:

"I didn't know exactly what I was going to be doing; it was vaguely something in an office... I remember that (first) morning.. every detail about it.. I.. was brought to the department I was going to work in and.. this elderly lady.. was set to explain to me what she was doing: she had a pile of pieces of paper in front of her that had numbers written on them and she had a microfiche... and she had to take the next number, look up and see if it was on this microfiche, and if it was, she had to .. tick it.. and if it wasn't, she did.. the opposite... Now she explained that exercise to me, I think three times .. and eventually, I figured out myself what it was that she was doing, and I remember that particular moment, because I suddenly thought, is this, is this what people do in offices for their whole life? Do they come into an office and do something like this all day for 30 years? And I remember.. that day... I remember thinking, whatever the way out of this office is, I'm going to find it very fast".

This is in fact what Martin did, moving quickly up the professional ladder, and ending up running his own business, having returned to Ireland for the purpose after over 10 years of business experience in London. Careers, generally, tended to develop over time, perhaps changing completely, as disillusion set in with original plans (although not usually on the first day, as with Martin).<sup>1</sup>

My informants have now arrived in London, had their first impressions and experiences, and found work and accommodation. In the next chapter, we find them sufficiently settled to have begun to establish socialising patterns with their new friends. Having survived the initial arrival period, which was experienced as more difficult than anticipated, how do my informants start to build their lives? As London itself becomes more familiar and manageable, the meaning and use of

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2 for details of the networks used by core informants and Appendix 8 for a list of informants' occupations.



early contacts and networks can be expected to change. What friends do they now choose, how do they spend their leisure time and where do they go? I look at whether Irish networks are chosen in this phase of life in London and at their meaning. I also look in more detail at work and home environments.

## CHAPTER 5

### CHOOSING COMPANIONS

To reiterate, my informants have now settled in and familiarised themselves with their new surroundings, and in this chapter, I will consider the patterns they established regarding whom they mixed with, where they socialised, how they spent their time. My interest here is in whether or not these choices brought my informants into an Irish milieu.

There are numerous potential reasons why my informants would seek out fellow migrants from Ireland. These include loneliness, the need for familiarity, deeper preferences for one's own people, and the difficulty of establishing friendships with the English. All of these were suggested by informants.

There is also the issue of migrant guilt, suggested by Miller, and referred to in Chapter 4. His contention (1990:93) was that the values in traditional Gaelic culture made it difficult to acknowledge the place of individual ambition in migration, which was consequently understood as "exile", "forced" by economic necessity. Emigration, in this view, needed re-defined to combat the sense in which it could represent betrayal of the homeland.

This situation is further complicated by the political history of England and Ireland, as for those who have embraced notions of Irish nationalism, or retained ideas of Britain's culpability in its historical actions towards Ireland, their decision to leave Ireland in order to live in Britain becomes particularly difficult to justify. This kind of guilt could

lead, post-migration, to a desire to seek out other Irish migrants.

It is the case, as I have indicated in Chapter 4, that some of my female informants felt guilty about leaving their families behind them. This was generally felt most sharply in relation to their mothers. A desire to live an independent, adult life could thus conflict with a desire to remain close to mother. This produced an unease in some informants which could be partially alleviated by frequent telephone contact and visits home.

The conflict between being independent and remaining close to mother is, of course, prime material for psychoanalytic analysis. Some of my informants were interested in understanding their motivations in this kind of depth. The psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein suggests that maturation involves a child being able to accept her need of 'mother' while also recognizing that goodness can be found outside this relationship.

If we extend her approach beyond individual mothers and allow the mother figure to symbolise the nation, maturation for the migrant could be seen as acknowledging that the mother country has something one needs and wants, but that other sources of fulfilment lie outside it. The idea that the mother culture is sufficient for all one's needs can, however, prove a compelling fantasy, and this is, perhaps, reflected in ethnic enclaves, where the host country is hated and rejected, despite one having chosen to live there. However, none of my informants chose to live in enclosed ethnic enclaves; this may

relate to their self-conscious interest in self-development.

It is important not to over-emphasize such theorising. In the main, my informants were not hampered by a sense of guilt about their migration. The guilt that some felt was less related to betrayal of Ireland, and more to the more personal issue of loyalty to mother and family. While it is interesting to speculate, as above, how this can be expanded beyond the family, my informants did not verbalise such notions.

I shall now look at what choices my informants actually made in terms of mixing with other migrants. I will look at five main areas: work, including choice of job and of colleagues; accommodation - whom my informants live with and where; leisure; friendship; and choice of partner. I will show that my informants favoured connections with other Irish people a significant amount of the time, but that the extent of this varied between these different areas as well as between individuals.

#### **WORK**

In facing a decision about what work to aim for, my informants made choices in accordance with their skills and education. Given the comparatively high level of these, their options were broad. I shall consider in this section whether or not they used these qualifications to obtain work in an Irish location. My suggestion is that a significant minority did so.

The first question to consider is what constitutes an Irish

location. There are four possibilities. (1) Historically, the Irish have been employed in large numbers in areas which have come to be associated with them, two examples being building sites, and nursing. A small number of my informants were found in these areas. With regard to building sites, while a stereotype of the Irish is of the unskilled labourer, one informant reported that Irish people tended instead to hold the skilled positions, which led to resentment among local, English labourers. While this may have been more relevant in earlier periods, as Scully (1994:144) has noted, earlier studies of the Irish in Britain often accepted the stereotype as accurate, and aimed to understand why it occurred, rather than examine if it occurred. (Jackson 1963; O'Connor 1972) This makes comparisons difficult.

(2) The second group encompasses self-evident Irish concerns, such as Irish newspapers (for example The Irish Post and Irish World), the Irish Embassy, and other smaller Irish centres or groups focusing either on welfare or on cultural activities. One of my informants, Breda, was a journalist for an Irish paper, and another, John, worked for the Irish Embassy. Diplomats in the Embassy will work closely with Irish people, both as colleagues and as clients, but by the nature of their profession, have also committed themselves to living outside Ireland for the length of their professional career. John suggested that the Embassy in London was considered an undesirable location, as most people joined the Foreign Office because they wished to travel further away from Ireland. Examples of Irish organisations focusing on welfare and Irish

culture include Aras na nGael (featured in Chapter 6), the Camden Irish Centre, the Kilburn Irish Youth Project, Trasna ("the crossing": a project for young Irish mothers), Brent Irish Advisory Service, Action Group for Irish Youth, and the London Irish Women's Centre (also in Chapter 6). Although these are all located in North London, where there is a particularly high concentration of Irish people, there are in fact many centres throughout London. Such organisations offer an excellent opportunity for my informants and others to choose to use their skills working for - and with - Irish people: not only is the clientele Irish, but staff of those organisations I encountered also tended to be largely Irish, either first or second generation.

(3) The next possibility is to work in an environment that is not obviously Irish, but in fact offers a significant number of Irish colleagues. The degree of choice here varies. For example, James ran his own pubs, which he chose to make Irish concerns by employing Irish staff, and which attracted Irish customers. In other situations, my informants were less able to shape the numbers of Irish colleagues.

Lastly, (4) I was informed of the existence of Irish firms set up to attract graduate Irish into the professions; these included Irish barrister firms, for example, with Irish staff who worked and potentially socialised together. None of my informants worked in this category. However, James referred to a business network of Northern Irish Protestants in London, which, he remarked approvingly, Catholics found it impossible to break into. He implied membership of this network, which

he said was a source of mutual support and assistance, similar to the masons.

In total, around one third of my informants<sup>1</sup> worked in these four categories. In comparison, around two thirds did not work in Irish business, traditional Irish lines of work, or with Irish people in any significant numbers. In this group, I include those who had one or two Irish colleagues, when it represented a small enough percentage in the overall size of the firm to ignore. The majority of my informants therefore chose not to work in a predominantly Irish milieu.

Analyzing what actually takes place in terms of work environment, however, is only part of the picture. To leave it at this assumes that my informants are in a situation which is their ideal choice, which represents, to a large extent, what they want. I shall now look at what my informants felt about the profusion or paucity of Irish colleagues in their work-place.

Most people who worked in predominantly English milieux found this enjoyable or acceptable; a couple of informants even felt that their being Irish in such a setting was advantageous, as it enabled them to 'get away' with more. However, a small number found working with English people problematic, either because of their difficulties with English characteristics (such as English humour or socialising habits), or their experience of English difficulties with them.

Of those who worked predominantly with Irish people, some

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<sup>1</sup> All numeric comparisons refer to those people from whom I received information. As I indicate in Chapter 2, numbers varied somewhat for each topic.

liked this, and some disliked it. I shall give one example in some detail. Breda was very dissatisfied with her job working for an Irish newspaper. The sexism of the men she worked with offended her, as did her sense of it being "so Irish!". She described how one member of staff had made a pass at her, and how her boss had upset her by suggesting that she wear short skirts and low cut tops to functions. When I visited the office, she drew attention to how one man tried to chat me up and another got into a fight outside the office. This was, she implied, typical of "Irish male behaviour". There were two other women in the office, but one had left because of the sexual harassment, Breda suggested.

Breda also found the political narrow-mindedness of the paper difficult, describing how they refused to print anything which might criticise either the I.R.A. or the Catholic Church, and had rejected articles she had written on Aids and gay groups, not wishing to acknowledge the existence of either. Working conditions were difficult in other ways: pay was in cash, with no sickness or other benefits, and staff were expected to work a six day week. Breda also described the office as filled with smoke and food cartons, problems which she attributed to the men. As a result of this discontent, she eventually left this job.

Informants also demonstrated ambivalence about mixing with other Irish people, for example, choosing to do so, yet expressing dissatisfaction with their actions. I met James, who ran a bar with predominantly Irish staff, at a dinner organised by the British Association for Irish Studies.



Despite these choices, he protested that he couldn't bear being surrounded by "Paddies".

Furthermore, Irish/English colleagues were not seen as homogenous groups. Breda's distaste for her Irish media colleagues prompted her to start work in an Irish women's centre, where she felt more at home, thus exchanging rather than abandoning Irish working locations.

Thus, the majority of my informants did not choose an Irish working environment and most were happy with this situation. A significant number of informants did choose to work in Irish environments, however, some enjoying this and others not. Ethnic characteristics are, of course, only one way of feeling that one has - or ought to have - something in common with others. In the area of work, particularly, decisions are based on many other factors apart from ethnicity, including one's skills and aptitudes, the location of the job, and the salary. This makes the choice to seek out an Irish employment situation particularly striking when it does occur, and it is therefore important not to disregard the minority of informants who made this choice. It also shows the importance of contextualising ethnicity as one of a number of factors which were important to my informants.

#### **ACCOMMODATION**

In this section, I consider my informants' choice of flatmates as well as their choice of where to live. I shall show that their preference for Irish flatmates was greater than their inclination to live in an Irish area.

Most of my informants were single. Around half lived in

rented flatshares. Of these, just over half lived with non-Irish flatmates, and the remainder lived with Irish flatmates. I shall now give some examples.

Mary lived in "co-op" housing, where a pre-requisite to being housed was being prepared to live with people from other ethnic backgrounds. Her flatmates were mostly African-Caribbean. This was something she valued, feeling that one learned from living with people from different backgrounds. Elizabeth chose her flatmates through a religious network, considering that this produced reliable people. Hugh, Richard and David, by contrast, friends from Northern Ireland, chose to live together on the basis of their existing friendship and the common origins which produced this.

Half of my informants lived either with a partner or with family. However, this figure is very largely affected by one family, the O'Connolls, who provided me with eight informants. Two members of this family were living with a partner, one was married and the rest were brothers and sisters living together, in two cases, with English flatmates also sharing the accommodation. A couple of informants had mortgages and lived alone.

None of my informants chose to surround themselves with the Irish of Kilburn. People tended to regard Kilburn, the area of highest Irish concentration, with distaste, associating it with working-class Irish, and considering it dirty and violent. A press release from the Kilburn Irish Youth Project expresses this clearly:

"Kilburn has always been maligned and looked down upon. It's almost right-on to refer to it as a dump because it

puts a safe distance between the 'enlightened' Irish and a cultural embarrassment". (3/7/97)

This was a consistent reaction and one which seemed to indicate an acceptance of a stereotype of undesirable Irish behaviour, while locating it at a distance from oneself.

Some informants did live in Irish areas elsewhere. Stephen, for example, was very proud of his local Irish "community" (his word). He took me to a local pub in Twickenham, where he made a point of chatting to many Irish customers and to the Irish bar staff. "You can see that I've built something up here", he said with a smile. He took pride in introducing me to other Irish people he knew in the pub and also spoke Irish to a few people. Stephen felt that where he lived was "perfect", as it was close to the London Irish Rugby ground and also convenient for sailing, two major hobbies of his.

My own initial impression was that Stephen's locality was predominantly English, but I realised I was comparing it to Kilburn, which had a particularly high density of Irish people, with visible Irish bakeries, pubs and Irish papers on sale. Stephen told me he would "murder" an "Irish Times" were he able to get hold of one, which again indicated that his locality was not as Irish as somewhere like Kilburn. He had thus chosen to live in an area where there were a significant number of middle-class Irish people, with whom he regularly socialised, but also a large number of English people.

Stephen told me he liked the "interaction" between English and Irish people in his local bar. However, I did not witness this interaction actually happening; furthermore, when I asked him what he thought of Kilburn, which is more exclusively

Irish, he did not disparage it like most informants, but simply said it was too far North for him. So, he did not reject the idea of a more exclusively Irish neighbourhood. However, it remains the case that he was living in an area which contained a mixture of Irish and English people.

Accommodation could provide other dilemmas. Elizabeth, for example, was undecided whether or not to buy a property in London. For her, this symbolised permanent settlement and she was uncertain whether this was what she wanted. She liked the idea of returning to Ireland, but wished to keep this open for the future, rather than act on it in the present. Meanwhile, she felt that renting was a waste of money and her family, whose opinions were important to her, encouraged her to buy somewhere. This produced considerable conflict and ambivalence which remained unresolved for Elizabeth throughout the fieldwork period.

Overall, a good number of my informants chose to live with Irish flatmates, while only a minority chose to live in an Irish area. This demonstrates a very significant interest in living with other Irish people, but also the limitations of this interest: my informants did not seek immersion in an Irish milieu.

### **LEISURE**

In this section, I shall look at some of the ways in which my informants spent their leisure time. I shall focus on two main areas, the Irish pub, and attendance at Irish groups. What I shall show is that overall, my informants preferred to spend their leisure time in Irish venues and with Irish

people, but that this was characterised by considerable diversity.

One of the most popular leisure activities for my informants was socialising in pubs. An association of the Irish with drink is, of course, integral to their stereotypical presentation. Scully (1994; 1997) investigates this in relation to Irish bar entrepreneurs and finds that her informants also forwarded this image of themselves. In her view, they colluded with the stereotype, manipulating it in order to maximise economic success, but were also subject to it in limiting ways.

My informants did not tend to caricature themselves as drinkers, although they did draw attention to the differing role of the pub in Ireland, and the differences in English and Irish drinking habits. I shall look at these next and then consider the kinds of pubs my informants attended in London. I will show that they preferred Irish pubs and often socialised in Kilburn. I shall then describe some Kilburn pubs and consider why my informants favoured Irish pubs.

The frequenting of public houses in Ireland forms a major way of socialising there, a common way of meeting friends and having "crack". In London, pubs have a different significance, being less central to the culture. Socialising patterns also differ: in London, people are less likely to talk to anyone unknown, or to attend in the expectation of bumping into friends. In Ireland, in small towns, and even in larger cities, one can pop into a pub and be likely to meet someone one can join. This is much more the case for men,

although female group attendance has become common in recent years.

These socialising patterns are illustrated by my experience with Stephen. He told me that he thought that English people tended to drink singly, not talking, whereas Irish people socialised with others, and this was enacted when I met him: he introduced me to other Irish people in the pub and we quickly started discussing how long we had all been in London, where we were from in Ireland, and when we were last "back", a conversation from which the English drinkers were excluded.

Another source of difference lies in perceived drinking habits. While in Ireland, an evangelical Protestant remarked to me that pubs in England were different because people did not get drunk the way they did in Ireland (and consequently, were less morally reprehensible in England, she added). Among my informants, one regular pub goer, Paul, referred to the same issue with a different attitude: he declared that English drinking habits were different, as the English would stop after a few pints and move on to soft drinks, but indicated clearly that he found this incomprehensible.

Twice as many pub-goers preferred Irish pubs to non-Irish pubs. I was informed of various Irish pubs across London, for example, a Kensington pub for "graduate Irish" and an Irish champagne bar in Belgravia.

However, Kilburn pubs were mentioned most frequently by pub-goers as regular haunts. This contrasts sharply with my informants' attitudes to living in Kilburn and their general

disdain for the area. Paul and his friends, Protestants from the North, while describing Kilburn as "dodgy", considered that as long as you watched out for "the bad one" in Irish areas, you would be safe; consequently, they still socialised here. (See Appendix 2.) Even those who did not frequent Kilburn pubs were aware of the existence of prominent Irish pubs in Kilburn, and those who did not attend pubs regularly were aware that the pub scene, and in particular, Kilburn pubs, were a possible social venue for the Irish. Some had tried Irish pubs and clubs, feeling an obligation to go along at the request of friends, but did not enjoy it. The sense that the Kilburn pub scene offered a compelling "Irish" way to socialise was thus felt by most informants, those who did not indulge in it feeling the need to explain themselves, with statements like: "it's not me", "Kilburn is too far away".

Some of the pubs in Kilburn closely resembled rural pubs in Ireland and this was commented upon by a number of my informants as well as noticed by myself. As well as being peopled almost entirely by Irish clientele, they had the same atmosphere as pubs in Ireland, where strangers are stared at and one has a sense of being surrounded by close-knit locals. I attended such pubs with Colm. We were indeed stared at when we entered, as we were strangers, and felt very visible and uncomfortable. Colm complained bitterly that those watching us

"haven't learned that you don't behave like this in England",

where he felt the appropriate conduct was to "have reserve and

keep to yourself". There was a gender element in this behaviour, as these pubs were also overwhelmingly male. I felt particularly visible and Alison also drew attention to how difficult it was to walk into these pubs as a woman.

Kilburn pubs were differentiated by class and by county. "Biddy Mulligan's" was known as a working-class Irish pub, and "McGovern's" as a more middle-class haunt, for example. I was informed by a man in the former pub that McGovern's was where men wore smart shirts and the women had "leaving certs." (the Republic's equivalent of A'levels). I was also told that one pub was known as a "Kerry pub", another as a Dublin or a Cork haunt, another as a place for Northerners. The divisions of the Irish community were thus reproduced in the geography of the drinking environment.

In this respect, Kilburn was typical of the wider Irish pub milieu. While I did not encounter the same division of pubs into the counties of Ireland outside Kilburn, other divisions were evident. Breda, for example, enjoyed a regular Irish women's music session with other lesbians in Hackney, but disparaged male-dominated pubs in Kilburn, and also "yuppie" Irish pubs. Tony avoided local pubs because they were full of drunken old Irish men, he suggested, while he preferred smart clubs with young Irish people in them. An interest in meeting women may also be implicit in this example and perhaps a class element. Irish pubs were thus differentiated by class, gender, and age of their clientele.

Why did so many informants attend Irish pubs? Scully (1994:271) suggests that the Church and the bar are two



symbolically recognized meeting places of the Irish. This was evident to my informants who, as I have indicated, sometimes chose to attend simply because it was something Irish people did. She also suggests (1994:257, 266) that the imagined pub community is a microcosm of the imagined national community. Drinking with other Irish people in an Irish venue could indeed provide a taste of being back in Ireland, which my informants enjoyed. They took pleasure in joining others who shared their attitudes to drinking and socialising and this could lead them to feel more "at home". However, this does not go so far as to endorse Ryan's (1990:56) suggestion that Irish pubs offer, "a reversion to a completely Irish way of life", as this was not a desirable situation for any of my informants.

Ryan (ibid) also suggests that Irish pubs offer an opportunity for Irish men to meet Irish women. This function was of more relevance to my informants: although on the whole they were not explicit about it, it was sometimes implicit in what they said, as, for example in Tony's remarks above.

Overall, enjoying the "crack" with other Irish people was important to most informants who attended Irish pubs, and in the way that these pubs were divided by class, sexuality and location, my informants could choose exactly what kind of Irish people they wanted to have "good crack" with.

Moving on from pubs, one of the questions which interested me about how my informants spent their leisure time was whether they chose to attend Irish group activities. By 'group', I refer broadly to a gathering of people interested in a

particular subject or objective. This can include courses, clubs, and a wide range of social gatherings, oriented to an activity or else predominantly to meeting others. I do not include religious or party political groups in this category, as these are covered in later chapters.

My findings are that those who favoured group activities chose Irish groups. I shall look first at the nature of Irish groups in London, then at the groups attended by informants and their attitudes to them; after this, I shall focus specifically on two Irish organisations, before, briefly, considering the non-group leisure activities favoured by my informants.

The variety of Irish groups and centres on offer for middle-class Irish migrants has increased with the growing numbers of professional migrants entering London in the 1980s and '90s. Broadly, there are two types of Irish organisation. Welfare organisations, firstly, aim to aid homeless Irish people, or those suffering from the effects of poverty or powerlessness. These have become more acceptable due to the shift in attitudes referred to in Chapter 1: while migrants of the 1940s and '50s had a self-sufficient ethos, disapproving of turning to outsiders and the government for help, today's migrants are increasingly aware that applying for government funding through the channel of ethnicity has become rewarding. They are more interested in the advantages of seeking help and feel less shame about this.

Developing alongside these has been a plethora of a rather different kind of Irish organisation, which I describe as the

cultural or social Irish organisation. These organisations, also referred to in Chapter 1, offer the opportunity for Irish people to socialise together, to celebrate Irish culture, and to have fun, rather than to seek aid. The growth of these groups reflects the growing numbers of middle-class migrants who choose to meet with other Irish people in celebration rather than support. I shall now consider the relevance of these two kinds of organisation to my informants.

Irish welfare organisations were not on the whole needed by my informants, who tended to have sufficient resources of their own. Occasional attendance to request housing advice was all I was informed of.

However, a significant number attended cultural or social Irish groups. There was variation in the kinds of groups attended. They encompassed those where people could learn about or practice aspects of Irish culture, such as Irish dancing, Irish language, Irish Studies and Irish musical sessions; sporting groups such as the London Irish Rugby Club, and an Irish women's football team; a few political groups focusing on the promotion of Irish concerns, such as Irish Awareness groups and "The Emigrants' Voice"; and a number which functioned simply to bring Irish people together, sometimes to do something together which was not specifically Irish, such as photography, massage, or creative writing and sometimes simply to socialise.

Those informants who attended group activities suggested as a reason for their attendance that this was a good opportunity to meet people, a way of making friends which was otherwise

difficult in a large city. Even those who did not attend groups supported this reading of their value. Joining Irish groups thus demonstrated an active desire to meet and associate with other Irish people and it was striking that all the informants who attended organised group activities chose Irish groups.

An important aspect of this bringing together of Irish people was the specificity of the groups. This could relate to a particular activity, but it could also limit the people who would be attracted by gender or class. An Irish women's creative writing class will thus ensure that one meets not only other Irish people, but Irish women, and not only that, they will share one's own interest in writing. One is therefore making three choices in attending such a group. Similarly, to attend an Irish University Association ball or other activity, one is guaranteed to meet professional Irish people, and the Irish Network likewise attracts middle-class attendance, by the type and cost of activities it offers.

Informants did not retain the same level of interest in their groups throughout the whole period in which I knew them. Mary, for example, joined an Irish women's video course when I first knew her, but later changed to a non-Irish course in her locality, as its convenience suited her. This might lead to the expectation that Irish organisations are of more importance early in a migrant's stay, until they become more established. Ryan (1990:60) suggests that Irish clubs form a temporary anchor "to what was known and familiar". However, Rosemary demonstrated the opposite, saying initially she

wanted nothing to do with other Irish people, choosing instead to be a "good citizen", but that after some time in London, she realised she was "denying" her identity, and ended up becoming very involved in the London Irish Women's Centre and the lesbian groups there.

A more general conclusion is therefore appropriate. Individuals assess what activities and interests suit their needs, and continue to assess this as their needs change. An interest in Irish activities can wax and wane at different points of an individual's life. Additionally, one can retain a consistent interest in Irish activities, but given the range of these on offer, simply swap one activity for another.

However, it is also the case that my informants were contradictory about their interest in Irish groups. Often those who attended many Irish groups played down the significance of this, or did not seem to realise to what extent they were involved in Irish events until I encouraged them to consider it. Likewise those who did not attend Irish events or groups stressed the importance of their Irish heritage. I shall consider these contradictions later in the thesis. Here, I merely wish to note that it is important to see my informants as flexible, developing, changing individuals, with a range of goals and values, some of which were more prominent at particular times than others. The virtue of an extended period of fieldwork is that one can view some of these changes and have a more overall sense of the importance of ethnic (and other) activities in the individual's life.

I shall now provide some details on two social groupings, the "Irish Network" and the University Association. I shall begin with the Irish Network. This was formed in 1989, describing itself in its publicity leaflets as an

"organisation of people of all ages, who are keen to... engage in a greater range of social activities",

ranging from,

"houseparties and visits to wine bars, to cultural events such as the theatre and cinema, to more active events such as dancing, rambling and sports".

I attended a number of Irish Network meetings. The activities were not specifically Irish, although they occasionally included Irish plays, but the idea was that people could do things which interested them with others they had something in common with, their "own kind", it was suggested to me. First and second generation Irish people, from Northern Ireland and the Republic, of all ages and both genders attended, some regularly, others infrequently. Members were encouraged to make suggestions and organise things themselves.

I attended this group on a number of occasions, taking part in walks and ice-skating and on my first visit, going to a formal meeting in Eaton Square with Caroline. I shall now give some details of my first visit. The formal meeting lasted about an hour, was followed by tea and informal mingling, and then an invitation to go out to eat pizza together. One of the organisers was very apologetic that we had to pay 50p for the tea. This seemed to conflict with ideas of Irish hospitality, and he attributed it, shamefacedly, to the rules of the venue. There was a book stall at this event, selling "O'Shea's guide to London", which I was informed was indispensable, and a

newspaper called "the London Irish Writer". Caroline was somewhat taken aback on this occasion to be approached by someone who recognised her from "home"; this turned out to be the sister of a friend of hers.

Divisions were sometimes evident at these meetings, in a range of ways. I shall give some examples. Firstly, on gender, I noticed that I distressed one young man from the Republic, as I was more adept at ice-skating than him. He admitted that he found it hard to be "put down by a woman", declaring this had never happened him before. The same man told me he found it difficult to be relaxed with me, but attributed this to my being a Northerner, and from a "tense" situation. This was another way in which divisions were perceived, as people often discussed the characters of Irish people from different areas.

The question of ethnic loyalty also arose. On one occasion, I was carrying "The Guardian" and as one person did not recognise the paper, another explained that it was "an English paper". For me, the issue was that it was left-wing. Secondly, during one of the walks in the park, a fruit and farming exhibition was passed. A few people looked at this but others deliberately avoided it, one person suggesting he had experienced quite enough of animals in Ireland and did not want to see them in London. This humorously displayed different attitudes to replicating Irish experiences in London.

Conversations which people held at these occasions covered first experiences in London (for new migrants); length of

stay; origins in Ireland; opinions of the English and of the Irish; other emigration destinations people had tried or were interested in; and other groups they had attended. Discussions about previous social events also featured, and I was informed about a "great night's crack" at a Greek restaurant, involving eating and dancing, where the Irish Network group were the only non-Greeks there.

The Network thus offered people an opportunity to socialise with other people whom they perceived to be like them, through shared ethnicity, class and also age, as most attendees were young. It provided the opportunities to make friends but also to find romance, as most were single. The Network did not set out to promote Irish culture or provide welfare support and was in this respect unusual among London Irish organisations. Indeed, one person told me she had come across no other group like it and, consequently, this was the only group she attended. Instead, it was primarily a social network and activities were not necessarily on an Irish theme. Thus, members chose to enjoy the activities that London could offer, instead of choosing to replicate experiences from back "home". In this sense it suited my informants' agendas well, in that it offered a chance to mix with other Irish people without being in an overwhelmingly Irish situation.

The second group I wish to look at is the University Association. These Associations developed from the Universities of Ireland group in Eaton Square, a traditional home of middle-class Irish people which had previously attracted only small numbers. With the new influx of graduate



Irish to London, the Universities of Galway, Dublin and Cork set up Associations for their graduates residing here. The London launch of the University College Dublin Association took place in the summer of 1989, the Association reaching beyond London into other parts of Britain and America. I shall now describe two women's attitudes to these Associations.

Caroline attended the U.C.D. launch. She described it as having a "heavy representation from the accountants" and "people in commerce", laughingly describing the people as "yuppies". Having returned to Ireland in 1990, shortly after the launch of the Dublin Association, and before her own University Association, Cork, was launched, Caroline declared that had she remained in London, these Associations would have been where she would have socialised, as she enjoyed mixing with people on the same educational level and social scale as herself. This was in contrast to her attitude to "the Irish Network", where she told me she found the people too "lower middle-class" to have much in common with - there were no other lecturers like her, for example; consequently, she found it difficult to talk to people here. The University Associations thus attracted professional people whom Caroline found easier to talk to. Their events were, she remarked approvingly, well organised.

Breda, however, while also describing University Associations as "yuppie", reserved much more contempt for them. She attended a U.C.D. ball in order to cover the event for her newspaper, although as a Dublin graduate herself, she could have attended through her alumnus status. She told me she was

dreading the ball, expressing loathing for the middle-class people and the superficial facade she anticipated there. Breda felt very out of place in such settings, with even the dress code appalling her. Her rejection of traditionally feminine ways of dressing connected with her expression of her sexuality, and the expectation that she would wear a formal dress would, as well as making her feel uncomfortable in unaccustomed formal attire, have felt like a denial of her lesbian identity. When she finally went along, her actual experience was mixed. She realised, she said, why she had made so few friends at college, disliking the yuppie, superficial facade so much, but nonetheless, she found herself enjoying the night in part, with its buffet, champagne and disco. Occupations of other attenders included surgeon, psychiatrist and musician, she informed me and tickets were £25 each, with proceeds going to homeless Irish.

These two experiences give an illustration of the character of the new University Association events, as well as the character of my two informants. They demonstrate that even two professional Irish women, each of whom have chosen to mix with other Irish people, can have very different reactions to professional Irish associations. The difference is not in their desire to mix with other Irish, but in how they picked out which Irish people they felt comfortable with, and this relates to their different personalities and experiences. It is unsurprising that individuals will have varying reactions to Irish events. What is interesting is that there are such a variety of Irish events and organisations on offer, enough

to suit a wide range of personalities and interests. As a result, my informants often found Irish groups which suited them.

Overall, a significant number of my informants were interested in attending groups and all of these chose Irish groups. While they exhibited considerable variety in their attitudes and choices, the range of Irish groups available meant that such diversity could be catered for. Activities at these groups were not necessarily Irish. Therefore the value of groups in ethnic terms was in the people my informants met rather than in the activities on offer.

As a postscript to this section, it is worth noting that my informants also practised a variety of social activities which did not fall into the categories I have looked at so far. These included voluntary work, going to the cinema and theatre, horse racing, live music, sport, visiting restaurants, and one man included shooting on an estate in Scotland among his pursuits. As with the other activities I have detailed, sometimes these involved Irish entertainment or company (for example, an Irish play or band, or going to the cinema with Irish friends), and sometimes they did not. In addition, there were more solitary pursuits, such as watching television, which again, included Irish programmes and non-Irish. Leisure choices clearly provide an opportunity to connect with Irishness, whether it is through watching an Irish television programme or drinking in an Irish bar. My informants chose to make this kind of connection a significant amount of the time.

I shall now look at the friendships my informants formed, arguing that ethnicity was a significant factor in influencing the people my informants chose for friends.

#### **FRIENDSHIP**

Rezende (1993:267) suggests that the value of friendship is in its emphasis on trust, support and self-revelation, which stand in contrast to the market ethos of "money-oriented, transient and impersonal associations"; these are, she notes, particularly associated with London life.

Friendship was of great importance to my informants. There are three reasons for this. One is that they were mostly unmarried. This meant that friendships were particularly emphasized, as family commitments did not limit the time available to invest in friends. Rezende suggests that in a time when divorce and marital breakdown is high, friendship becomes the "standard" for relationships between family members and partners. I would add that friendship also becomes more valued in itself in a time when marriage begins to be less confidently associated with permanence, although not necessarily for reasons of its own permanence. Rather, friendship is perhaps the relationship par excellence of the modern age, with its emphasis on choice, flexibility and self-revelation.

The second reason for its importance is that my informants' families of origin (and indeed any other established support network) were absent, having in most cases been left behind in Ireland. It therefore became important to replace these in London, and a central way of doing this was through

establishing friendships.

Thirdly, my informants emphasized the Irish talent for socialising, for making friends and having good "crack". This kind of remark was very frequently made, often unsolicited. Socialising formed an important part of how my informants saw their ethnic identity and was of value to them, and forming friendships was a valuable part of this.

I shall now look at how to define "friendship". The question of who is a friend, is of course a problematic one. Stephen, for example, pondered this aloud, when I asked him to talk about his friends. When I changed the question to, 'who do you mix with', he had no problem in replying. My informants varied in the intimacy as well as in the extent of contact they had with other people and "friend" must be defined broadly, to be relevant to the range of their experiences. I therefore define a "friend" as someone whom my informants sought contact with due to a sense of connection or of liking. The extent of this seeking out could vary from taking time to converse with them at work, to meeting regularly in each other's homes, to exchanging personal and intimate information. (Rezende 1993)

There is a gender distinction here, as my female informants were more disposed to share personal information than male informants. For some males, exchange of information and banter was sufficient to produce a friendship. Giddens (1993:126) notes that an in-depth study of 200 people in the U.S.A. showed that two-thirds of the men could not name a close friend and of those who could, the friend was most

likely to be a woman. Three-quarters of the women could easily mention a number of close friends, virtually always other women.

Whom did my informants choose as friends, and what role did shared ethnicity play in this? A large number of informants favoured friendships which were either predominantly Irish or involved Irish in addition to other kinds of friendships. Why was there such a high degree of preference for shared ethnicity? I suggest a number of reasons.

Firstly, Rezende (1993:266) suggests that her informants chose friends from similar backgrounds due to the similar ways of thinking and behaving, and shared ideas on politeness and personal disclosure which this produced. For my informants too, this was an important reason for choosing people like themselves: the ease in communicating with someone who spoke the same language (by which I mean something broader than simply using the same words). Of course, if this sharing and ease were the predominant factors sought, if this was found with non-Irish people, it could supersede the desire for ethnic similarity.

Other possible reasons include: a sense of loyalty to or nostalgia for one's homeland, leading to a desire to recreate it in a small way and related to this, a simple valuing of what were perceived as Irish characteristics and experiences. These could be accompanied by a potentially reciprocal feeling of difference in relation to English people.

The attitude of English people to Irish migrants was indeed central for some informants, Caroline providing a striking

example of this. (See Appendices 2 and 9) While living in America, she had very few Irish friends, she told me, but in England, many if not most of her friends were Irish. She put this down explicitly to English hostility: it was because English people were "not that welcoming to foreigners", she told me, and correspondingly, Irish people were "easier to make friends with". The difference in attitudes between English and American hosts, which was so striking to Caroline, may be attributed to their differing historical experiences with Ireland. The history of conflict between England and Ireland, continuing during the time of my fieldwork, was undoubtedly an important factor in producing hostile reactions to my informants in England.

Related to this, other Irish people's attitudes could also affect the possibilities and choices made about friendships. Alan, an accountant, felt that it was very difficult to mix with his largely English accountant friends, and also with the Irish builders who were working locally, as both groups felt he should not join with the others. This also demonstrates a class element. Each group expected him to make a choice between them, although no-one made this explicit. Rather, it became evident when he tried to break the unspoken rules. While this shows the potential difficulties of mixing with Irish and non-Irish people equally (and also of mixing across classes), it also illustrates the cutting edge between expressing a view and acting on it. Where action is concerned, other factors invariably interfere with one's aspirations, reminding us of the multiplexity of any given

situation.

Lastly, my informants have chosen to live in a country which exhibits a mixture of sameness and difference in relation to Ireland (same language, skin colour, approximate geographical location; different country, customs and histories). Were they wishing to leave behind everything familiar, they would be more likely to choose somewhere with fewer Irish migrants, and more striking cultural differences.

Although more informants chose Irish friends, some preferred to mix predominantly with English or other cultures. In this set of informants, some felt that they had little in common with other Irish people and resented the expectation that they would have. As migration is, I suggest, a journey of discovery and an opportunity to broaden horizons, it is not surprising that Irish friends are not exclusively sought.

Indeed, none of my informants chose to mix with other Irish people exclusively, even those who either spoke favourably about mixing with other Irish people or who demonstrably did so frequently. In part, it would be impossible to function in a multi-cultural English city without any contact with people of alternative ethnic backgrounds. However, it would be possible to mix much more exclusively with Irish people than any of my informants favoured.

My informants differentiated between different kinds of Irish people in this as in other areas.<sup>2</sup> Liam, for example, suggested that he had more in common with Northern Irish Protestants than with fellow Catholics from the Republic. He

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<sup>2</sup> I deal with this in more detail in Chapter 7.



was typical in the sense that he differentiated kinds of Irish people, but less so in feeling more in common with those who by sociological category were unlike him. Usually, when my informants mixed with other Irish people, they were the same category of Irish as themselves, in terms of class, religion and broad regional origin, that is, from the North, or Republic.

However, my informants tended not to draw attention to favouring people on these terms. Instead, many emphasized to me the lack of deliberate choice involved in their establishing friendships. They told me they did not particularly seek out a specific type of person for a friend, whether the specifics concerned ethnicity or any other characteristic. They were, consequently, frequently surprised to 'discover', following my enquiry, that their friends were mainly Irish, or that they were non-Irish. Some people suggested that the Irish were simply friendlier and easier to get to know, and this was the reason why one's friends were mostly Irish. In other words, "it just happened that way" because Irish people were easier to get to know.

Even those who did emphasize choice were more likely to demonstrate a certain distancing or confusion about it than to show clarity. Mary, for example, told me,

"I had an unconscious thing: I didn't want to get into a totally Irish circle, you know. I felt I wanted to meet different people. Sort of get out and about a bit."

When I questioned her about the unconscious aspect, she explained,

"I didn't deliberately avoid the Irish scene but because maybe I, when I came over here, I didn't fall into an

Irish scene automatically, there wasn't a scene ready-made that I just sort of slotted myself into... In some ways I could, well, I had to choose how I was going to do it".

In a factual sense, Mary's suggestion that there was no Irish "scene", which can be taken to mean collection of Irish activities and centres, was inaccurate, and in fact we met in an Irish centre; however, she obviously felt that no such presence impinged on her, at least initially. This demonstrates a merging of the language of choice with that of the "it just happened" variety.

This is similar to Rezende's findings on friendship. (Ibid:261, 266) Her informants did not emphasize choice, yet their selection of friends was limited to those with similar class and ethnic backgrounds, which would indicate that choice, although unacknowledged, was operating. Indeed, friendship is normally understood by social scientists as being "a relationship based on choice". (Ibid:261) Out of the great range of people that a typical resident of London may meet, there is obviously a considerable degree of selectivity operating as to whom one sees again, reveals information to, is concerned about.

The choice of friends can, furthermore, be understood as an identity issue. "In postmodernity", Rezende (following Giddens) suggests, "individuals are more aware of identity choice" and "consciously experiment with their identities". She also refers to Strathern's suggestion that this has a class element:

"middle-class people... like to analyze.. and make implicit practices explicit". (Ibid:259)

So why did my informants abdicate responsibility for choice?

I suggest that denying the existence of choice reflects an ideology about friendship, that it is somehow unmodern, or unsophisticated to seek out one's friends too narrowly or deliberately. The apparent unconsciousness is, I suggest, to do with a desire to present oneself as open and relaxed about whom one mixes with, which relates to ideas about what is modern and acceptable about friendship.

With my informants, it also relates to ideas about what degree of mixing with one's ethnic group is acceptable. To admit to narrowly seeking out only Irish people seemed to have a stigma about it for some of my informants, as indeed, to choose deliberately to avoid them altogether, might hint at betrayal. Thus, my informants chose the friends they wanted and affected a lack of responsibility for the outcome: "it just happened" means one cannot be accused either of narrowness, or of disloyalty to one's countryfolk.

However, my informants were more explicit about other kinds of divisions, such as political ones, and verbal approval or disapproval was often given to other different "types" of Irish. Breda for example, gravitated towards female, lesbian Irish like herself, finding much to despise in conservative, male, traditional Irish culture and people. Others distanced themselves from Irish republicans. Alex was disapproved of by his colleagues in an Irish welfare organisation for attending socials in the Irish embassy, as it was perceived to devote insufficient funds to the needs of Irish emigrants. He told me that the reason his colleagues didn't attend was probably because they were not invited, but agreed that it pointed to an ideological split.

Where differences resulted from individual choice rather than

accidents of birth, my informants were thus more likely to feel able to judge them openly. This may reflect a desire not to be bigoted in terms of factors individuals cannot change; these do not seem to be regarded as legitimately defining personality. However, as my informants in fact often tended to gravitate towards people sharing their background, this would seem to be an area where ideology differs sharply from practice, or where ideology represents a rhetorical representation of what one ought to think, rather than what one does think or do.

It is also worth noting that other issues may affect friendships more than or along with ethnicity: gender, religion, class and sense of humour were examples given to me of important things to share. My informants, furthermore, had different personal situations. Some came over with a network of friends to accompany them or to join, while others knew no-one on arrival; some found it easier to make friends, or had more need of friends than others, who preferred a more solitary life; some had family or partners in London which reduced their need for friendships.

While personal circumstances thus affected the degrees of friendships formed, many informants stressed that it was difficult to make friends in London. This was also emphasized by Rezende's informants. (Ibid:263) It was variously attributed to the size of the city, lack of community, and/or unfriendliness of the English.

It is worth returning at this point to the issue of my relationship with my informants. For some informants, male and female, I became a close friend, someone to whom they told things which they had previously kept secret. This perhaps

illustrates something of the potential loneliness of the life of a migrant in the city, and of the difficulty of making friends which many of them pointed to. It also illustrates something of the complication of being a researcher, where one accompanies informants over an extended period of their lives, asking questions about their thoughts, feelings and desires.

To sum up, my informants often favoured Irish friends, but as in other areas, not in an exclusive way. Irish people were easier to get to know, my informants suggested, and the perception of shared attitudes and ways of behaving was, I suggest, important for them. However, my informants were inclined to underplay the degree of active choice involved in making friends, for reasons related to an ideology about friendship and a corresponding desire to present themselves as modern and open.

#### **CHOICE OF PARTNER**

Walter has found that 46% of Irish-born women marry Irish-born men. (1988:22) Ryan's figures (1990:62) show a lower rate of marriage within the ethnic group, with only 36% of migrant marriages involving two Irish partners. I shall now consider my informants' attitudes to choice of Irish partner, suggesting that these demonstrated considerable ambivalence.

Only a small number of my informants were married or co-habiting. In most of these couples, both partners were Irish, one Catholic, the other Protestant. Such partnership would, paradoxically, represent exogamy from the point of view of those still living in Northern Ireland and endogamy from an English or outsider point of view. Most of these couples

informed me of great opposition existing to their relationships in Ireland, contributing to their decision to emigrate.

The majority of my informants were, however, uncommitted in relationships. By this I mean, either not in a relationship, or in a relationship that was recent or not characterised by a commitment to permanence. This is typical of the wider situation: Walter (1988:21-2) has highlighted the high rates of single Irish migrants and Lee (1990:35) draws attention to the high proportion of single people in the Republic and Northern Ireland.

However, this does not mean that my informants did not value relationships. Most of those informants who discussed these matters with me emphasized the importance of finding a partner. While more women than men spoke with me about this, those men who did talk about it stressed its importance as strongly as did the women.

It is worth noting that discussing hypothetically whom one would like to have a relationship with is very different from discussing one's actual choice of partner. This kind of talk involves the presentation of an ideal. The "ideal" partner is likely to be very different to the person one meets and ends up in a relationship with. In ethnic terms, who represented the ideal partner for my informants?

Opinions varied on this and my informants tended to be contradictory; that is, they tended to voice contrasting views and this in turn could contrast with those people they had actually chosen to have relationships with in the past or present. What they said and what they did were thus at odds. This was less likely among those in committed relationships;

for them, speaking hypothetically of whether an Irish or non-Irish partner was preferable was somewhat redundant, as they had made their choices and were unlikely to draw attention to ideals which contradicted them. (Nor did it feel appropriate to press them on this.)

For those whose ideal was to be with another Irish person, the reasons given were that having something in common and not having to explain your background would be more relaxing and generally better; in one woman's case, parental approval also figured. In her case, her ideal was not only an Irish person, but specifically, a Northern Irish Protestant like herself. When preference was stressed for a non-Irish partner, aspects of Irishness which were disapproved of could be quoted as reasons for this. Irish men were portrayed by one woman as moody, repressing their emotions and with a tendency to drink too much.

This representation of the ideal choice of partner evidently indicates something much wider. Giddens (1993:45-6) sees romantic love as the combination of passionate love with the quest for self-identity. I suggest that the choice of partner is indeed, in part, a choice about self-identity. In choosing an Irish or non-Irish partner, one is making a statement about oneself, but also about one's ethnic heritage. To state that a non-Irish partner is preferable is to indicate a desire to reject, rather fundamentally, what is deemed to be on offer in an Irish person, with all the background they bring. For a small group of informants, avoiding relationships with Irish people fitted in with a desire to leave behind all traces of Irishness and was thus consistent with a wider goal. Again, to ideally prefer an Irish partner indicates a very positive

feeling about what Irishness and Irish people have to offer, and shows a preference for living in contact with this heritage long-term.

However, as I have indicated, idealised views were not always expressed in a clear-cut way, but with ambivalence. For example, the woman who considered Irish men as potentially moody, also stressed that this did not apply to all Irish men and that those who were not like this would be more desirable than an English partner. Likewise, a report back from a lesbian workshop at the 1989 L.I.W.C. conference suggested that while being involved with Irish women was good, offering a common background, similar language, and the experience of meaning the same things by the same words, it could also be very claustrophobic and intense. With English women, a barrier was seen to exist, as it was felt necessary to explain what it was to grow up as a Catholic or Protestant in Ireland, but this was seen as freeing as well as draining.

How can these contradictions be understood? Firstly, one could suggest they represent changes in attitude over time. I believe that on the whole this is too simple an explanation and does not adequately explain their preponderance. I shall therefore suggest an alternative reason, employing Holy & Stuchlik's (1983) analysis.

Holy & Stuchlik distinguish three different levels of reality: the description of (1) an ideal situation; (2) what will or should happen in a particular situation; and (3) what has indeed happened. Different behaviour is considered appropriate in each category. My informants may thus talk about (1) whether it is more desirable to emphasize their Irish background or their new British-based life in an ideal



world; this may differ from (2) what they say will or should happen in the actual world, where there is ambivalence about one's aims and perhaps difficulty attaining them, or where a number of aims conflict; these can both differ from (3) what is actually done in this world, where hard choices have to be made.

So, I observed that some of those who said an Irish partner was preferable had only had relationships with non-Irish people, and had not shown any change in socialising habits which would counter this pattern; and some of those who stressed that they were open to people of all nationalities, seemed to have had relationships predominantly with Irish people.

Analyzing in terms of this three-fold distinction enlightens the contradictions which were routinely expressed by my informants on this topic and in other areas. It also raises the question of how the three are connected. Do ideals influence action, or is it indeed appropriate to expect that they should? One may state an ideal in a way that is designed to communicate either a sense of loyalty or of negativity towards Irishness, without planning to act on it. This is similar to rhetorical support for the "armed struggle" in Northern Ireland, as opposed to actually taking part in armed combat. The former is a kind of flag waving, of marking oneself as a loyal Irish person, or whatever congruent image is sought. The latter indicates a serious commitment to the actual content of the words rather than solely what they symbolise.

If one is entirely certain of a particular preference above all others, one is more likely to take steps to ensure that it

is translated into practice. For those for whom inconsistency is apparent, many other preferences may have entered the picture, such as for someone of a similar age or class; someone one finds attractive or kind, or whatever other aspect is valued. Also, the reasons for favouring an Irish or non-Irish partner need to be remembered. If one says an Irish partner is preferable as s/he will share attitudes, one may be surprised to find an English partner who offers this experience; the reason behind the stated choice could thus become more important.

So, for ideals to be translated into action is appropriate for some people and not for others. I would suggest that consistency between behaviour and stated preferences relates to: (i) greater certainty about ideal statements, which are less interfered with by alternative, contrasting ideals, and which consequently become more compelling and direct behaviour more clearly; or (ii) the holding of fewer ideals, with more emphasis on what is realistic and possible in an individual's situation.

I shall now look at the extent of marriage with other migrant groups. Walter (1988:21-22) finds that 24% of Irish-born women marry migrants from elsewhere, compared with 12% of U.K. born who do this. Only one of my informants seemed to have both experienced relationships with other migrants, or with British people of minority ethnic status and also to state that she valued them. Mary felt that different migrant groups had a common experience of minority status which was valuable. She spoke of her own experience of the frequency of relationships being formed between Irish women and African-Caribbean men.

However, the fact that this tendency was not in evidence among most of my informants perhaps indicates their degree of integration. As they do not see themselves as an oppressed minority, they are less likely to be attracted to others on the grounds that they too are in this position.

The issue is one which can cause conflict among Irish people.

One woman at a L.I.W.C. conference, who identified herself as,

"an Irish woman who is married to a black person and is the mother of a Tanzanian-Irish daughter, growing up in Britain", (L.I.W.C. 1988/'89:31)

complained of the "white racism" of the British but also of the difficulty she had being accepted within the Irish community. This kind of racial mixing, while more common among Irish migrants, is thus also potentially isolating, as other Irish migrants can reject such a choice. This highlights once again the kind of divisions that can exist within the Irish "community".

To sum up, a small number of my informants were in relationships and most of these were with an Irish partner. The majority of my informants were uncommitted in relationships, however. When discussing whom they would choose as a partner, they exhibited considerable ambivalence and contradictions, which I suggest can be understood through employing Holy and Stuchlik's analysis of representational levels.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

My informants chose Irish companions and venues a significant amount of the time. They did not wish to immerse themselves in an Irish milieu, indeed found this prospect disturbing, but instead chose those aspects of the Irish social context which appealed to them.

In the domains I have looked at, it is clear that only a small number of my informants chose to work in an Irish area. This indicates that ethnicity was of much less relevance to my informants in the workplace than other concerns, such as finding a job which suited their skills, was rewarding, well-located and well-remunerated.

Regarding accommodation, a significant number of my informants chose to live with Irish people. Few lived in an Irish area, however, and none in the most well-known and densely populated Irish area, Kilburn. Thus, being with other Irish people was considered most desirable when this was not an exclusively Irish experience.

Regarding choice of partner, my informants were most equivocal. Their ability to see both sides of this question again showed their desire to retain their connection with Irishness but not in a manner which excluded other options. Thus, they did not wish to shut themselves off from the possibility of meeting English and other non-Irish people. They also held both positive and negative attitudes to other Irish people, which made it difficult to know whether an Irish partner was ideal or not. This choice was therefore more easily made in relation to actual individuals, where other factors could be assessed, such as physical attraction and personality.

It was in leisure and in friendships that my informants' desires for connections with other Irish people were made most plain. These are areas which are important for self-expression and identity construction. They are also of particular relevance to Irish ethnic identity, as my informants saw socialising and having 'crack' as something

which was an important part of Irish experience and which Irish people did well (see Chapter 7).

Furthermore, they are areas where other values and priorities are less likely to impinge, in the way that skills and salary do regarding choice of work; and they do not involve an either/or choice in the way that work, accommodation and partner choices can. One can, usually, only work and live in one place, and be in a (monogamous) relationship with one person. In leisure and friendships, however, one can be more plural, and this suited my informants in the sense that they wished to broaden their options, rather than close them down.

Clearly other factors influenced my informants' actions in each of these areas. Ethnicity was but one variable. Its importance was also subject to variation and change over time. Furthermore, my informants differentiated between different kinds of Irish people and Irish activity. Nonetheless, the extent to which my informants chose to involve themselves with other Irish people, particularly in leisure and friendships, was striking.

I now move the focus away from my informants to the kind of Irish organisation available to today's migrants. In Chapter 6, I will therefore present case studies of three Irish organisations.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE IRISH ORGANISATION

The three organisations I have chosen to focus on in this chapter are Aras na nGael, the British Association for Irish Studies, and the London Irish Women's Centre. I have chosen these partly because I simply have the most information about them, but also because I consider them to be, in important respects, characteristic of the contemporary Irish organisation and what it offers the latest wave of migrants.

By looking in detail at the aims and appeal of these organisations, I hope to provide a fuller picture of the changing concerns and interests of contemporary migrants and the contribution this kind of ethnic organisation makes to meeting them. The differentiation which my informants made between kinds of Irishness was also clear on an organisational level and I consequently wish to draw attention to the conflict between different interest groups within the Irish community as part of this picture. To begin with, however, I shall provide contextual information, also on an organisational level.

I have already indicated the kind of Irish organisation available to the Irish migrant, and the milieu in which such organisations are located in earlier chapters. The Irish organisation is not in itself a new phenomenon. Irish Centres and groups have been available almost as long as Irish people have been migrating: County Associations, for example, were popular in the 1940s and '50s and the Irish Literary Society

was founded in 1891. There is, however, as I have indicated, both a qualitative and quantitative difference in the organisations of the 1980s and '90s, as both their numbers and the range of issues they cover have expanded dramatically. The 1997 "Guide to London for Young Irish people" produced by the Action Group for Irish Youth, itself formed in 1984, while primarily restricting itself to youth provision, lists an enormous number of London-wide Irish organisations, covering welfare advice, health, gay and lesbian issues, legal rights and much more. Characteristic of the 1980s and '90s organisations, furthermore, is the development of two major foci, namely welfare assistance and cultural celebration.

The reasons for the increase in Irish organisations are two-fold. British attitudes have changed, firstly, and it has become much more acceptable to be Irish. Positive responses were assisted by the post-war influx of African-Caribbean and Asian migrants, whose unmistakable difference in terms of skin colour and language helped reduce the perception of Irish migrants as alien. While as late as the 1970s, signs were reported which advertised "No Irish, No Coloureds, No Dogs", this seems unthinkable in the 1980s and '90s. "Race"<sup>1</sup> relations may still be strained, and hostilities continue to the extent that the British National Party succeeded in having their first local councillor elected in the East End in 1993. However, these election results were greeted with horror by

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<sup>1</sup> I concur with contemporary sociologists in regarding "race" as a construction employed to emphasize difference.

the mainstream, demonstrating that the consensus of opinion had moved on.

Indeed, this period saw local government funding increasingly dedicated to the needs of ethnic minorities. This happened in the context of Ken Livingstone's chairing of the G.L.C. (Greater London Council), and the domination of several inner London Boroughs by the Labour Party. These left-wingers emphasized their support for ethnic minorities, women, lesbians and gay men, and backed this by funding initiatives.

As funding is a consequence of public acceptability, this represents another respect in which the 1980s and '90s are qualitatively different. While the Catholic Church pioneered funding for Irish organisations in the 1950s, (Lee 1990:43) in the 1980s and '90s, a greater variety of funding from public and secular sources became available. The Irish government, slow to assist its migrants, was among those offering help in this period. The removal of the religious basis to Irish ethnic organisations tended to be valued by my informants, who saw the previous coalescence as restrictive. This financial incentive, combined with a lessening, if not a removal, of "racial" tension, to create an atmosphere in which Irish groups could proliferate and proliferate they did.

The second reason concerns changes within the Irish community. As I have indicated earlier, whereas the migrants of the 1940s and '50s were inclined to stress self-help and independence, the 1980s and '90s have witnessed an increasing emphasis on the role of less individual factors in the migrant's career,



such as public prejudice and injustice. This is coupled with an increasing acceptance of the value of turning to Irish organisations for aid: asking for help need no longer be seen as humiliating, when it is identified with public injustice rather than personal failure. This has meant that Irish people began to feel able to take advantage of the new climate which encouraged ethnic organisations in Britain. This resulted in some hostility from older migrants who retained the self-help ethic and disparaged those who joined what they saw as the ethnic bandwagon.

On an organisational level, to form an Irish organisation to assist Irish migrants could also be re-interpreted: it no longer needed to imply that Irish migrants were failures, but drew attention to these wider social issues of justice and rights. The Co-ordinator of the Kilburn Irish Youth Project (K.I.Y.P.) (formed in 1986), for example, suggested to me that his project was "typical of a new era of Irishness in London", with Irish people being far more "politicised and progressive" than before.

Related to this confidence in the validity of asking for help, is the "remarkable surge in cultural self-confidence" which I refer to in Chapter 1. As it became increasingly in the migrants' interests to acknowledge their ethnicity, whereas before it would have been more in their interest to conceal it, it became possible for the Irish migrants to nurture their "affective" link to their ethnicity, in Glazer & Moynihan's terms, that is, their emotional connection with their ethnic heritage, without compromising these interests. Irish people

have thus felt increasingly able to display and celebrate their ethnicity and have turned to Irish groups and centres to do so. The existence of Irish organisations has thus in large part depended on the development of a culture in which they could be accepted within both British and Irish contexts.

However, the picture has not been entirely bright for the Irish organisation: in 1986, the G.L.C. was abolished, following a long conflict between the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher and Ken Livingstone. Mrs Thatcher also imposed funding cuts which significantly undermined the left-wing policies which had been forwarded in London under local Labour control. This led to considerable tensions and competition for funds among organisations whose financial viability was now under threat, a situation which pertained at the time of fieldwork.

As I indicated in Chapter 5, my informants supported cultural organisations rather than welfare groups. I now consider in detail three organisations available to the Irish migrant during my fieldwork, all of which attracted middle-class Irish people (providing me with a number of informants) and emphasized the value of Irish culture. They are each a product of the 1980s-'90s and provide a commentary on what was available within the Irish community in this period.

#### **ARAS NA NGAEL**

Aras na nGael, literally, the house of the Irish person, is an Irish centre located in Kilburn. My information on this Centre comes from numerous visits there, when I participated

in Irish Studies classes, attended other functions, socialised in the bar and generally looked around; from conversations with others attending the Centre; and from a comparatively formal interview with the Centre Co-ordinator, Jonathan.

I shall describe the Centre, suggesting that it was typical of the new kind of Irish organisation available in this period in its promotion of Irish culture for middle-class migrants. I shall also draw attention to the hostility it evoked within the Irish community. This illustrates the divisions of the "Irish community" and also something of the contemporary tensions around funding which I have described.

According to Jonathan, Aras na nGael was the only centre of its kind in Britain and America, the two main areas of Irish immigration, in that its focus was cultural rather than welfare-oriented; it was also, he suggested, unusual among contemporary Irish organisations and centres, for example, the Camden Irish Centre, in that it was an entirely secular enterprise. It was set up, Jonathan told me, as a result of a group of people in the early 1980s wanting to provide a centre of excellence for the Irish community and Kilburn was chosen due to its dense concentration of Irish people. The aim was to set up something qualitatively different to other Irish organisations.

The Centre was, indeed, ground-breaking, in focusing entirely on cultural celebration, as most centres include a welfare focus, and it is more usually individual, smaller-scale groups which focus on culture alone. However, as I have indicated above, Aras na nGael was taking its place in the new milieu of

the 1980s and '90s where increased cultural celebration and more widely available (and secular) funding were the norm.

Planned as a resource for the Irish community, the Centre encouraged the affiliation of culture-oriented groups and outside cultural initiatives. It aimed to provide a focal point for Irish people, but also to attract other ethnic groups, with the hope, Jonathan told me, of showing that Irish culture is

"not a joke, it's legitimate.. it's actually there",  
adding,

"(it) raises the esteem for Irish culture".

This raising of esteem was hoped to apply to Irish people themselves as well as to non-Irish visitors. Jonathan's long-term hope was that the Centre would be a place which tourists in London would visit to enjoy Irish cultural events on offer for their entertainment.

Facilities included a bar and a handball court. The rest of the space was designed to be multi-purpose, to allow for a variety of activities. Groups which met there included women's and pensioners' groups, Irish Studies and Irish Language classes, "Glór an Deoraí" ("The Emigrants' Voice"), an alcohol discussion group, Set Dancing, Old Time Dancing and traditional Irish music classes. The management committee consisted of representatives of the groups and of Brent council. Affiliated groups included the Irish in Britain

History Group (now disbanded) and Irish Mental Health group.<sup>2</sup>

The Centre also carried out research into the needs of the Irish community, and supported the research of affiliated groups. In keeping with the idea of being a resource, a noticeboard provided information on Centre activities and on educational, cultural, sporting and political events elsewhere. I noted advertisements for Glór an Deoraí; the Brent Show 1989; Picture Ireland, with painting, drawing and visual imagery; Common Lore - storytelling and song; Irish Theatre Co-op; Rally for British withdrawal from Ireland; Carnival in Finsbury Park; Irish football; training schemes for young Irish migrants; Lynch's coaches; and information on the Community Charge.

Jonathan reported that a wide spectrum of people attended the Centre: families, single women, Protestants and Catholics and first, second and third generation Irish. In addition, 5% of those attending were not Irish. I observed, through my own attendance, Irish people of various generations, mostly Catholic, with the occasional Protestant (including myself) and a few non-Irish. I also noted that women felt comfortable coming in alone, as Jonathan had suggested, in contrast to how difficult this would be in the male-dominated Irish pubs of the Kilburn High Road. I was told that religious differences "never" caused a problem, but that racism towards African-Caribbean people was evident whenever they visited the Centre.

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<sup>2</sup> There is a high incidence of mental ill-health among the Irish community in Britain. (Brent Irish Mental Health Group 1986)

Hostilities never broke out openly, Jonathan told me, probably, he added, because management were known to ban anyone who stepped out of line.

As I have indicated, I attended a number of functions at the Centre, including an Age Exchange Play based on research into Irish pensioners' experience, and focusing on their migration experience in the 1940s and '50s. The audience was largely composed of Irish pensioners who had come to London in their youth. I also attended Irish Studies classes, which covered political, economic and literary history and women's experiences in Ireland; these provided me with some informants and I shall consider them next.

The Irish Studies term lasted for 10 weeks and led to a diploma course, which could pave the way to taking a degree. For people with few formal qualifications, this was an important route to third level education. The weekly format was a two-hour lecture, followed by socialising in the bar. As the class was held in Aras na nGael, there was a bar downstairs, which meant that this class lent itself more easily to social contact than, for example, the Irish language class, which, being held in a school, at a distance from any pub, tended to finish when the class ended.

The people who attended the Irish Studies classes were a mix of young and older, newly emigrated and long established, female and male, first and second generation and from North and Republic. Most attendees were Catholic, with two Protestants present, including myself and one English woman. Both working-class and middle-class people attended, with jobs

ranging from motor-cycle mechanic and encyclopedia salesman, to town planner and accountant. Most people seemed left-wing in political orientation and on the whole more sympathetic to nationalist than unionist aspirations, but opinions were mixed.

The topics discussed generally related to being Irish in London. Attitudes to Ireland varied, with second generation people frequently expressing a romantic view. A group of three second generation women were shocked when I made some critical comments about Ireland. One admitted that they had a romantic view because they had not lived there, and they agreed they found my criticisms hard to accept. For them, Ireland was everything that was relaxed and friendly, whereas London was cold, stressful and the people uncaring. By contrast, first generation migrants often complained about visiting Ireland. This kind of difference led to the explicit contrasting of first and second generation Irish experiences.

Other topics included what the Irish were like, whether Royalty was a good thing, how much to integrate, whether England and the English could be forgiven for their historical misdeeds, whether an Irish passport was a badge of identity or just of residence. Sometimes those who shared the same status, for example, having migrated recently, shared their feelings about this in twos and threes but the group was also very open to the experiences of the others. People made a point of encouraging the English woman, who was recognised as an outsider and welcomed more as a result, and were careful

not to offend her by being negative about the English in her presence. Indeed, she was admired for her persistence in attending, even though she left before the series of lectures ended.

These evenings were very relaxed, involved repeated rounds of alcohol, and were generally considered to be "great crack". My attempts to take only soft drinks in order to remember everything that was said were thwarted, as I was simply bought alcohol anyway. The effect of drinking together meant that these conversations were relaxed and free flowing. They also allowed for some conflict of opinion and could be passionate: could Paisley be considered as Irish, for example, raised definite, opposing views.

Only twice did this conflict cause any tension. Once, a Catholic man from the Republic challenged my identification of "Northern Ireland", stating that this was an artificial distinction, and that there was only "Ireland". Interestingly, another Catholic man intervened to smooth things over hastily, before I had a chance to respond. On the second occasion, another Catholic man from the Republic was involved. When the band played the Irish national anthem at the end of the evening and everyone stood, as was customary, Liam initially refused to stand and support such overt nationalism, although he in fact bowed to peer pressure and eventually did so. In discussion among the group, it was noted that this playing of and standing for the national anthem would not happen in such a way in Ireland, a telling reminder of how the expression of ethnicity changes with



migration.

In terms of those using the Centre, however, conflict was much less prevalent than the more general sense of commitment to harmonious relations with one's fellow migrants. This did not preclude lively disagreements such as those described above, but care was taken to ensure that these remained friendly.

Among those running the Centre, there seems to have been much less harmony and a great deal of infighting between different groups vying for control over how the space should be used. This conflict continued, with Jonathan being sacked subsequent to my interview; it was suggested to me by an independent source that this was as a direct result of internal political manoeuvrings.

Outside the Centre, within the Irish community, I encountered considerable hostility, which Jonathan also drew my attention to during our interview. This could concern the details of how the Centre was run, Deirdre complaining to me that it lacked "spirit", and needed to get more young people involved, more popular Irish bands playing there, for example.

More significantly, there was considerable opposition to the overall philosophy of attending to Irish cultural expression instead of welfare needs. Many of those Irish organisations set up to cater for the welfare of homeless Irish people or those suffering from poverty or powerlessness strongly resented the existence of a centre which focused, in their view, on cultural fripperies. Indeed all those who voiced an opinion to me, from these kind of centres, voiced anger.

Jonathan also suggested that he faced hostility from non-Irish sources. He attributed unfair government funding decisions to "inherent racism...at officer level" and complained of anti-Irish media attention when the building was discovered to be structurally unsound. These two examples may have had elements of anti-Irish feeling in them, but could also be unrelated to ethnicity. However, Jonathan clearly experienced them as anti-Irish attacks.

The antagonisms directed at the Centre from within the Irish community strike me as significant. I suggest there are a number of reasons behind them. Firstly, there is the fundamental and pragmatic difficulty of competition for limited funds. During my fieldwork, many organisations suffered cut-backs and redundancies and in this situation, seeing a Centre - which had spent £1.3 million on completing merely half of its building (although this precise information, given to me by Jonathan, was perhaps not generally known) - taking such a large chunk out of limited funds without even providing for those Irish people whom they considered most in need, was indeed galling.

A second issue concerns the ideology lying behind the appeal to government funding. Welfare organisations are inclined to suggest that the political history of Britain and Ireland, and the racism experienced by the Irish person in Britain, make it impossible for the Irish to thrive; hence, their organisation provides essential assistance. The mere existence of professional and successful Irish people can be seen to threaten this definition of the Irish as suffering victims,

and thus the whole enterprise and *raison d'être* of Irish welfare groups, leading to corresponding hostility. This need not be the case. In all walks of life, some people need more assistance at certain times than others. However, what I am describing is an emotional reaction on the part of some welfare workers.

A third explanation focuses specifically on class and its relation to ethnicity. Among some middle-class migrants, there is a tendency to see working-class Irish people as somehow more "real", more truly Irish, as I found within my own group of informants, and a corresponding desire to distance themselves from the designation "middle-class", even where this is indisputable by any generally accepted index. The hostility which I witnessed for middle-class Irish migrants among Irish workers in welfare organisations was quite startling, particularly when these workers could be designated as middle-class themselves. Centres and groups which focus on cultural expression rather than welfare needs, and which tend to attract a greater number of middle-class migrants can thus receive the hostility of those who wish to underplay their own middle-class status, rather than celebrate it, for reasons of ideological preference for working-class culture, or from a desire to be somehow more genuinely Irish.

A fourth understanding connects with this explanation, by returning us to Miller's (1990:93) analysis of Irish culture and emigration referred to earlier in the thesis, whereby emigration was associated with guilt and betrayal of the

homeland. I have suggested that this was not, in the main, the case for my informants, although it may have been underplayed by them. However, one setting in which such inner conflicts can potentially be played out is in that of the Irish organisation.

For those who find the conflict between being loyally Irish and living in Britain difficult, perhaps a way of resolving the issue is to work in a welfare organisation for needy Irish migrants. This has the advantages of: (i) easing the sense of betrayal by surrounding oneself with - and assisting - one's countryfolk; (ii) adding credence to the concept of "forced" emigration in that those migrants who are homeless or poor can not be said to have chosen emigration out of careerism or other individual aspiration.

For those who choose this option for these reasons, an organisation such as Aras na nGael, where there is no ideology stressing forced migration, and where there is no opportunity to expunge guilt through assisting Irish migrants with pressing welfare needs, is perhaps disturbing. To see other, successful Irish migrants not having to play out such inner dilemmas may feel intolerable to the migrant who does not him or herself feel so free.

This analysis is not intended to suggest that all Irish migrants suffer from guilt, or indeed that all workers in Irish welfare organisations are particularly driven by this difficulty. However, it is worth noting that for some migrants more than others, migration may involve a sense of betrayal, which requires justification and the Irish

organisation is one setting in which this can be acted out.

Aras na nGael is unusual in focusing entirely on cultural celebration, but in doing so, signals a change in what is acceptable and desirable, both within the Irish community and in the wider British context, in the current phase of migration. Its mere existence shows the demand for a place to validate Irishness for the middle-class. While the Centre is not exclusively middle-class, its emphasis on culture rather than welfare does make it attractive to the more affluent Irish. That a place which aims to be a "centre of excellence" exists attests to a new situation where Irishness can be something to be celebrated, and is not just a focus to attract government funding for underprivileged migrants, important (and new) as this also is. Its separation from the Church also signals a recent development in the ethos of Irish organisations. The conflict and hostility which are evoked by the Centre are a measure of wider issues and divisions within the Irish "community", including the very practical one of funding difficulties.

#### **THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR IRISH STUDIES (B.A.I.S.)**

I became a member of B.A.I.S. during my fieldwork, attended their annual conferences and other events, and read their regular mailings. I also made links with other members, who embraced me as a fellow academic, and arranged for me to give some papers on Irish migration.

I shall describe B.A.I.S.'s aims and ethos, and draw attention to the paradox that, although appearing to welcome a wide

range of Irish people, it in fact sought to engineer conformity to certain images and representations of Irishness. This reflected and also contributed to divisions within the Irish community.

B.A.I.S. was formed in 1986. According to its constitution, its objectives were,

"to encourage teaching, research and writing in Irish Studies, to the public benefit, by establishing a means of communication between those interested in Irish Studies in all disciplines and by producing ... materials which will assist in the development of Irish Studies". (B.A.I.S. information sheet<sup>3</sup>)

Its aim was to establish Irish Studies in all levels of education, and in the long-term, render its position "unassailable". (Hickman 1989) B.A.I.S. defined "Irish Studies" as embracing,

"all those disciplines which involve the study of Ireland, and the culture, history, politics and economic activities of the Irish, both at home and overseas".

Those who ran B.A.I.S. saw their role as providing advice and support for existing programmes and initiating new ones. Two facilitative functions were disseminating information and promoting networking and B.A.I.S. encouraged educational links between Great Britain and Ireland.

Other specific examples of its work included the organisation of a biennial Irish Studies conference and an annual public lecture series, and the production of a Newsletter and other publications (Survey of Irish Studies in Britain, Irish Studies in Britain (replaced by Irish Studies Review (Sammells & Hyland eds.), in 1992) and Irish Literary Supplement).

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<sup>3</sup> The following unattributed quotations also come from this source.

B.A.I.S. financially supported initiatives such as Leicester's annual conference on "Irish Dimensions in British Education" and funded the post of Director of the Joint Education Programme, having worked with the Institute of Irish Studies at Liverpool University to develop this. With the Irish Tourist Board, it ran an annual essay competition called "Images of Ireland", for undergraduates. In addition, the Irish language sub-committee developed a series of Irish language examinations, scholarships and conferences.

The organisation had charitable status and was controlled by elected officers and an Executive Committee. Patrons included eminent figures such as Séamus Heaney, Robert Kee, Professor Brian Fender. A full-time Executive Director was appointed in 1989 from funding obtained from the Allied Irish Bank (£150,000 over 3 years, considered one of its major coups).

While B.A.I.S. membership was only 240 in 1989, its profile seemed to be high and it claimed to be,

"regularly consulted and asked for advice by many organisations and individuals, including the U.F.C... Department of Education, the inspectorate, teachers, Irish Studies activists and members of the general public". (Hutton 1989:6)

In short, B.A.I.S. initiated and supported an impressive range of programmes, and was in large part responsible for raising the profile and the prevalence of Irish Studies.

B.A.I.S. was not the only Irish Studies initiative in this period, however. Also flourishing were Irish Studies centres at Liverpool University ("the first multi-disciplinary teaching and research centre of its kind in Great Britain": "An Irish Identity", 1989:17) and the University of North

London, adult education classes in Irish Studies in many cities and an Irish education group in Manchester, which led the field at local authority level. As Hickman (1989:4) has noted, Irish Studies "has changed greatly in the past 10 years", growing in an unprecedented way.

O'Hara also pays homage to the changing Irish scene:

"these activities reflect the growing awareness of, and interest in, Irish Studies, which is taking place in Britain",

and adds,

"not just amongst the Irish or second generation Irish here; many of those following Irish Studies courses have no Irish background". (Spring/Summer 1989:24)

The discipline which began by attracting Irish people in adult education institutes, who wanted a route back into education and could choose a subject which was of personal interest to them, has thus continued by expanding its base beyond such ethnic enclosure.

I attended a number of B.A.I.S. conferences and shall now give some detail on these. Other attendees were a mix of male and female, academics, students and some lay people (that is, not involved in the academic field, but present through a more personal interest), also Protestants and Catholics, those from the North and the Republic, as well as second generation and non-Irish. Such diversity could lead to possible tensions. I shall now look at how these were managed.

My surface impression was that there was no sense of hierarchy between students and academics, or other groups, and that cliques did not seem to prevail. Introductions tended to start with which part of Ireland one hailed from, or for second



generation people, which part one's parents came from, rather than what one's academic background was. The ethnicity of non-Irish attendants was also discussed with interest, and their involvement in Irish Studies encouraged. However, this represented a commitment to working together as equals, and as such, was an ideological aim. This commitment did not in fact eliminate divisions.

Humour was very important in dealing with potential conflict in relation to religious and political divisions. Jokes about "Taigs" and "Prods" (Catholics and Protestants) figured, the overall atmosphere appearing good-humoured and accepting. I witnessed one Catholic from the Republic, who held a lecturing post in America, teasing a Northern Irish Protestant lecturer for behaving according to the stereotype of his ilk. The man in question had been boasting about how he had secured a bottle of wine at a cheaper rate and was told he was a typical canny "Northern Prod", driving a hard bargain, not missing a trick. A diplomat from the Republic teased me on another occasion, asking if I was wearing the cross around my neck as protection against the general company. I was not sure if this related to my Northern origin, which he had also teased me about, or his assumption of my Protestantism, but like almost all of the remarks of this nature which I witnessed, it was entirely good-humoured.

Similarly, in the after-dinner speeches at another conference, the North and the Republic were referred to by one speaker through all of the various namings and political options available, producing copious laughter: these included, "the

South", "the 26 counties", and "Charlie Haughey's potato republic" (the latter being Paisley's term); and "the North", "Northern Ireland", "the province", "the six counties" and "the black North".<sup>4</sup> Thus, divisions were highlighted and defused by humour, rather than ignored in the hope that they would remain hidden.

While traditional rivalries were laughed away, other differences could continue to disturb. At a conference in Twickenham, for example, a prominent Irish feminist and journalist aggressively attacked a number of male speakers for being sexist. After this, the tone changed, speakers becoming extremely careful about their language and "he" being assiduously replaced by something more inclusive or explained by "(sic)". One man told me he had been hiding in the toilet to avoid "that bloody woman".

Hickman draws attention to divisions within Irish Studies on another level, that is, between adult education and community organisations, and higher educational establishments. She quotes Desmond Fennell's distinction between two groupings in Dublin, the "urban, liberal, middle-class of South Dublin", who viewed themselves on issues such as "the H-blocks, Haughey and the 8th amendment campaign" (all Irish issues) as "Nice People versus the Rednecks". The Rednecks were,

"relatively ignorant, rural, working-class, bigoted Catholics, who South Dubliners saw as making up most of the rest of Ireland".

Within the Higher Education grouping, there was, Hickman

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<sup>4</sup> "Black" here means staunch loyalist. The Black Order is a more senior version of the Orange Order.

suggested,

"a tendency.. to act as if they were the Nice People and rest of us (sic) were Rednecks". (1989:6)

She considers this attitude to be much diminished two years on, but I suggest that there remains an undercurrent of antagonism between the two groups. This impression is based on conversations with one prominent B.A.I.S. member, but also on my sense of recognition of the division when I read Hickman's remarks.

B.A.I.S. thus had a considerable task to try to maintain a united front. It did this, as I have suggested, by employing humour. It also tried to control potential tensions by limiting the expression of political ideology, which I look at next.

In its aim to establish Irish Studies as a mainstream, respected subject, B.A.I.S. was determined to eschew political activity. It forwarded itself as a "non-political" and "non-sectarian" organisation and its constitution stated that any members involved in "political or social action" could not use the name of B.A.I.S. to support their actions. Even in the choice of patrons, this attitude could be seen, as Heaney has been lambasted by some critics for taking an insufficiently political stance on Northern Ireland. In addition, I was informed that officers had sought advice from one of my informants on how to keep what he described as the "loony left" out of their organisation. This non-political attitude was disapproved of by other, more political Irish organisations. Furthermore, a result was that B.A.I.S. was not as open to all those working in Irish Studies as it

claimed, as political activists were clearly unwelcome.

As well as limiting political behaviour, B.A.I.S. manipulated social behaviour to its own ends. This was through its assumption of a secondary role, as a social focus and facilitator. I shall now look at the various ways in which B.A.I.S. used this social role to further its aims.

B.A.I.S. promoted an informal, social side alongside its formal, academic activities and this was acknowledged by the organisers. Reporting on the 1989 conference in Liverpool, the Director described it as, "most successful, both as an academic and as a social occasion". (Hutton 1990:8) At the A.G.M. following the conference, the chairperson, in addition, reported with pride that the catering staff had praised those attending the conference for being so friendly and down to earth. She cautioned that B.A.I.S. must never forget that it was "just people who get together".

My own experience of these conferences was indeed that the social aspect was highly valued by all, with late night drinking accompanied by spontaneous music-making, and general "crack". While the academic standard was high, there was always space for informality and fun, jokes about hangovers accompanying the papers given late in the conference.

However, these social occasions had a purpose, as B.A.I.S. used social events to make contacts and to garner financial backing. St. Patrick's Day celebrations could serve this function. (I heard one to which Conservative M.P.s were invited described as the "Brits' night out".) One informant disparaged this way of proceeding, with its emphasis on

influence and contacts, aligning it with the Conservative views of some of the members who favoured it. However, I would align it with the overall emphasis on presenting Irish people as an informal, friendly group of people, who like to have fun. Gaining contacts and perhaps finances through the promotion of this very identity was thus integral to the aims of the organisation and ensured consistency of actions and ethos.

A further aspect of this socialising was how it was connected to a version of Irish identity. Thus, Alex suggested that the social side of B.A.I.S. was an example of "macho" socialising, where one was expected to prove ones Irish credentials, by drinking and having "good crack" until the early hours of the morning. He noted that the same people who behaved in this way would disparage those who insisted that Irish people must prove they held a "pure" political position before being deemed properly Irish, yet they did the same thing on a "cultural" level. Indeed, apparent proof of this was the reaction to him when he declined to stay up late or to dance to Irish music, as he was accused of being "British" (being second generation) and "anal retentive", as if these were synonymous. While this was voiced in humour, the message was still clear: by not taking an active part in the socialising, he had jeopardised his claims to Irish ethnicity.

B.A.I.S. thus appealed to a broad ethnic identity, one which all Irish people could belong to and agree with, and which was based on the idea of the Irish being people who "have crack" together. This was appealed to as a fundamental on which all

could agree, and through which other differences could be placed in perspective. Indeed, through this strategy, these very differences became a source of the "crack" which united the Irish, in that religious and political differences became sources of humour.

This furthered B.A.I.S.'s support across the Irish community and in turn strengthened its chances of success in obtaining funding and advancing its aims. In these circumstances, those who appeared not to join fully in manifestations of "crack" were threatening the unifying base of B.A.I.S.' appeal and as such, could provoke antagonism, as in Alex's case. The fact that he had a prominent role in B.A.I.S. meant that his fellow organisers, who made the remarks, were likely to have felt particularly irritated.

In creating and appealing to a common identity, B.A.I.S. did more than widen their appeal to gain members and support; they also manipulated this sense of identity to retain support and commitment to their cause. Behind all the other aims of B.A.I.S. was an ethical and proselytizing element which lay behind the whole enterprise of Irish Studies, namely that Irish people should support Irish Studies.

This was forwarded on three grounds: (1) it was implied that supporting Irish Studies was in potential members' own interest as B.A.I.S. improved their profile in British society, through counteracting negative images and proffering alternative, positive ones. However, this was emphasized less than the suggestion that it was (2) a moral imperative, that is, what 'good' Irish people would do; lastly, (3) B.A.I.S.

appealed to the migrant's emotional connection with their ethnicity. I suggest that these three were often conflated, and could be deduced from various statements B.A.I.S. made.

For example, when my B.A.I.S. subscription became overdue, to encourage me to renew, I was reminded of the help I was giving to the establishment of Irish Studies and the raising of its profile and status, rather than reminded of what services the organisation could offer me personally. Again, the Manchester Irish Education Group spoke explicitly of how it was combatting racism in "Irish Dimensions in British Education" and how it affirmed and supported those who wished "to explore and reaffirm their Irish identity". They also noted that "there is a renaissance of Irish culture, and we have played our part". (B.A.I.S. Spring/Summer 1989:24) Part of what is required in being involved in Irish Studies, as encouraged by organisations such as B.A.I.S., is thus a commitment to Irish identity as a positive phenomenon and as something worth promoting in British society.

So, what may appear as a purely academic organisation can be seen to have another agenda, relating to ethnic identity; B.A.I.S. workers thus created their own version of Irish identity and turned it into a "mission statement".<sup>5</sup> They then appealed to migrants to recognise their individual indebtedness to the services B.A.I.S. offered due to moral and emotional connectedness with the Irish identity they

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<sup>5</sup> I employ here the language of contemporary voluntary organisations, encompassing aims and objectives.

furthered, and in recognition that it was in their own interests, in a sometimes unfavourable environment, to support this endeavour.

B.A.I.S.'s emphasis on learning can itself be seen as an important representation of Irish identity. Kockel, in analyzing Irish identity, looks to the ancient division of Ireland into four provinces, East, South, West and North. Each is associated with different values, the West's identification being with Learning. His article asserts the continued relevance of the four divisions and their associated values, in understanding modern Irish identity. His suggestion that,

"the West as repository of Gaelicism was assigned a specific educational role: to preserve the language... to teach it in Irish Colleges, and to generally foster Irish culture", (Kockel 1995:250)

could well describe the role of B.A.I.S. The B.A.I.S. emphasis on Irish culture as something to be learnt, understood and valued, was intended to woo the Irish back into a sense of faith in their own culture, but also extended into British society, aiming to educate the British into a similar appreciation. To learn about culture, one must ideally also 'do' it, and its emphasis on socialising was thus an integral part of this enterprise.

B.A.I.S. was thus a leading organisation in the emphasizing and re-claiming of Irish culture. Its approach was didactic, and included a participatory enjoyment of 'culture' as well as an intellectual learning of it. To obtain the support of all sectors of the Irish community, it was essential to have a strategy to contain the potential conflict between the



differing sections along the lines of religion, politics, gender, aspirations and so on. Humour was the tool with which potential tensions were at once acknowledged and defused.

In addition to this, a particular version of Irish identity was forwarded, one in which Irish people shared the capacity to have "good crack" together. This was an identity which all could share rather than one which heightened divisions. Indeed, by humorously playing up divisions, these were cleverly transformed into the shared enjoyment which could, in fact, unite. Ironically, despite this apparently broad appeal, as a result of this strategy, certain Irish people and certain behaviours were excluded.

#### **THE LONDON IRISH WOMEN'S CENTRE (L.I.W.C.)**

The L.I.W.C. was located in North London, but offered itself as a resource for all Irish women in London.<sup>6</sup> I attended the Centre on many occasions, participating in its groups and conferences, talking to Centre workers, and to attenders. I suggest that the L.I.W.C., like B.A.I.S., while presenting itself as open to all Irish women, in fact promoted a very specific version of Irishness and indeed of womanhood, which limited its appeal to a much narrower group of Irish women. Political ideology was very prominent in all its activities and it was this tightly defined political position which shaped its representations on both ethnic and gender lines. I shall detail this in my account.

The London Irish Women's Centre was developed in 1981 from

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<sup>6</sup> Although in one L.I.W.C. report, it contradicts this by describing itself as a "local women's centre". (1987:3)

three existing groups, the Irish Women's Abortion Support Group, the London Armagh Group (who,

"campaign for British withdrawal from Ireland and ... against the strip searching of women in Maghabery and Armagh (prisons)" (L.I.W.C. 1988/'89:17)

and the Women and Ireland group. It aimed to be,

"a continuation, a development and an expansion of the work of these groups". (L.I.W.C. 1986:5)

Funding was obtained in 1983 from the G.L.C. Women's Committee and one full-time job was created. A building was purchased in December 1984, three workers employed in 1985 and the Centre was finally opened in February 1986.

The L.I.W.C. was set up to provide a focus for London Irish women and a place for them to meet. As the only capital-wide organisation of this kind, part of its remit was to become a "central co-ordinating body". (L.I.W.C. 1987:3) It was run by a management committee, who held regular consultative meetings, encouraging "all Irish women" (L.I.W.C. 1986:14) to get involved.

In its 1987 Annual Report, (1987:2) the L.I.W.C. noted the need for a "secure social, political and cultural base" (my emphasis) which it hoped to provide. Each of these objectives led to certain activities, which I will consider in turn.

The social aspect of the Centre's work was provided for by the interaction possible in the many groups which met there and by socials and céilís. Groups and classes on offer included the Older Women's Reminiscence Group, Irish Saturdays for children, Irish Language, Self Defence, Women in Irish Literature, Counselling sessions, Video and Radio Production Groups and Irish Lesbian line. This is not an exhaustive

list. Others included: Irish Language, Community Radio classes, Video na mBan (Women's Video Group), Voice and Singing Workshops, Photography classes, Drama courses, Women with Children group, Women and our Experiences and Feelings about the Six Counties, Guitar Group, Massage courses, playing the Bodhrán, Creative Writing, Welfare Rights advice and one-off information sessions, for example on the Council Tax. The Centre also provided meeting rooms; photocopying, typing, printing and library facilities; a dark room; musical instruments; and its own video and P.A. equipment for hire.

Annual conferences were organised for all Irish women in London and Britain, which offered further socialising opportunities. At these, the many groups based at the Centre reported on their year's activities, and workshops were provided on wide-ranging issues affecting Irish women, such as emigration, sexuality, spirituality, housing, children and issues around Irish identity. The conferences passed resolutions and usually ended with a céilí.

The Centre's work was also characterised by a number of political agendas. First, it embraced sexual politics. This involved the promotion of two issues: one was feminism, and the other, lesbian rights and identity and I look at these next. (See also Chapter 10.)

Regarding feminism, the Centre aimed to empower women, highlighting the oppression and invisibility women faced. They noted that,

"It was a political decision to.. set up a place for Irish women... This would ensure that we could never

again be overlooked or ignored." (L.I.W.C. 1986:5)

To this end, classes were held which gave women skills traditionally reserved for men, such as media skills: women could learn to use audio and visual equipment, such as video cameras, and learn to broadcast through a radio group, Spectrum Radio, which propelled positive images of Irish women's activities in London over the airwaves. The opportunity for women to become skilled in the use of such equipment was seen as having a

"definite political advantage. Demystification of the media means that we can take control of.. and present our own image to the outside world". (L.I.W.C. 1987:4)

The staff recorded women's history as it happened at the Centre, with video and audio recordings of various events organised, and written reports of speeches and papers given by L.I.W.C. representatives forming an archive of material kept at the Centre. This act of "taking control of our own history" (ibid:5) was intended to ensure that Irish women's history would no longer be invisible.

A lesbian sub-group and lesbian telephone line were also based at the Centre. The group aimed to

"put an end to the isolation often felt by Irish lesbians in London, by offering support and friendship and by encouraging lesbians to make full use of the resources at the Centre". (L.I.W.C. 1986:15)

This group was very visible at the Centre, campaigning for the recognition of lesbians within the Irish and London communities; annual conferences always had a lesbian workshop and the Centre itself displayed lesbian information prominently.

Tensions were apparent between lesbian and heterosexual women.

The most overt example of this was during a "sexuality" workshop at an annual conference; there was a heated argument as to whether this should be open to heterosexual women, the lesbians who attended felt strongly that it ought to be 'their' workshop, and the heterosexual women felt equally strongly that it should also be open to them.

The second political strand was ethnic politics, which was closely interwoven with gender issues. This entailed promoting the Irish in Britain. Irish women were held to suffer from discrimination and oppression on both gender and ethnic grounds. L.I.W.C. stated specifically that they aimed to

"counter the discrimination Irish women in London face as a result of their nationality and sex". (Ibid:7)

The inter-twining of both these themes was deliberate, as the Centre arose out of dissatisfaction with the existing London Irish network - seen as male-dominated and sexist - and the British feminist scene - perceived as dominated by "white, English, middle-class" women with little understanding of Irish issues.

The deliberate merging of these twin oppressions could be seen in L.I.W.C. childcare provision. This had the feminist aim of liberating women to work or attend Centre activities, but also had an ethnic dimension. Thus a childcare worker advertisement in March 1991 stated bluntly,

"You must have knowledge of how discrimination operates to the disadvantage of Irish women and children in London";

furthermore, Irish language classes for children were offered

"as a step towards strengthening children's Irish

identity". (Ibid:8)

The Centre thus actively integrated the twin campaigns of gender and ethnic liberation. Their vision aimed not only to support whole, unfragmented people, but more radically, to assist Irish women to "take political power". (L.I.W.C. 1987:2)

In doing this, the L.I.W.C. was confronting a situation which Aretxaga (1997:8, 12) has also described for nationalist women in Belfast, namely their invisibility within the discourses of feminism and nationalism. Gender is, in her analysis, fundamental to the construction of national identities and to ideas of the self and 'other'. Being Catholic and working-class can not, she suggests, be added to being a woman, but rather, fundamentally constitute who that woman is. At the L.I.W.C., this was very much the kind of position that was taken. One of its consequences was, of course, the exclusion of those women who did not see themselves as so constituted.

The Centre also took a clear position in relation to British-Irish relations describing these in terms of

"the war in the North of Ireland and England's present and historical role in it". (L.I.W.C. 1986:2)

Its position was "anti-imperialist", terminology repeated in various annual reports and conferences; it complained of "British imperial pomposity" (ibid:16) and favoured the immediate removal of British troops. Overtly political classes relating to "the war", campaigns to stop strip searching and to support republican prisoners, and "Troops Out" marches were advertised. Apparently apolitical classes,

such as drama, were also threaded with this kind of politics: one drama group focused on "drama of the oppressed" techniques, for example. In this picture, emigration from Ireland was seen as "forced" by the economic ramifications of Britain's imperialism.

There were a small number of Protestant groups at the Centre, but they concurred with these views. Their positioning was evident even in their names, for example, the "Anti-Imperialist ex-Protestant Irish Women's Group". Even the milder "Irish Women from Protestant backgrounds" showed distancing, rather than any proud claiming of an alternative heritage.

A further political strand concerned British politics, seen separately from its relation to Ireland. Here, socialism was promoted and related to this, the favouring of working-class women. This could be inferred from statements which expressed alienation from the British feminist movement partly on the grounds that it was "middle-class". This preference also connected with the Centre's ideological focus on aiding the oppressed, since working-class women were traditionally held to be more disempowered. Despite this preference, many middle-class women used the Centre. This was partly because of the "cultural" activities on offer, which I detail below.

It is interesting that, despite the prevalence of political aspiration, Centre supporters felt that their difficulty with obtaining charitable status was due to the automatic and

unjustifiable British equation of Irish with political.<sup>7</sup> This complaint was at odds with their overt and deliberate cultivation of political interpretation and action, perhaps indicating on some level an unawareness of the extent to which politics shaped what the Centre had to offer, or else revealing a strong sense that they should not be punished for this approach. It also showed a ready willingness to see British and Irish camps as opposed. I shall now look at the cultural activities offered by the Centre.

Cultural activities were themselves politically motivated and intertwined with feminism. In the 1986 report we read,

"the L.I.W.C. sees the nurturance and promotion of Irish culture as a very important function of the Centre - in particular the contribution to and involvement of Irish women in this work is seen as vital". (L.I.W.C. 1986:9)

In practice, this entailed inviting female Irish musicians, artists and writers from Ireland to perform in London and setting up classes for women in Irish language, dancing, music, history, literature and drama. This contributed towards "raising the public profile of women in Irish culture in London". (Ibid:9) The Centre also had an arts resource section and studio and had inspired one all woman céilí band, "The Sheelas", which performed London-wide. By moves such as this the L.I.W.C. saw itself as,

"reclaiming a cultural heritage which has long been male dominated". (L.I.W.C. 1987:5)

The Centre also focused on welfare needs, unlike my previous two examples. Its largest welfare problem was homelessness,

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<sup>7</sup> A requirement of charitable status is that an organisation is apolitical, although the Charity Commission modified its requirements in this respect post-fieldwork.



although D.S.S. problems were also increasing in 1988/89. It claimed to take thousands of calls a year on housing and welfare problems and had set up the Irish Women's Housing Action Group; this campaigned for legislative change, lobbying local councillors, and disseminated advice and information on rights. Following substantial funding cuts in 1988, the Centre increased its focus on welfare work, stressing,

"the need to respond to the very pressing demands of Irish women living in poverty, fear and isolation".  
(L.I.W.C. 1988/89:2)

This tendency to cut back on cultural expression when funds are tight could also be seen in the attitude of welfare groups to Aras na nGael, as I noted.

It is clear that the L.I.W.C. forwarded a very specific political line in all areas of its work, in relation to gender as well as to national/ethnic politics. It promoted feminist, lesbian and republican/nationalist views, with an additional preference for working-class militancy. This conflicted with its presentation of itself as being open to all Irish women in London, and it caused tensions among some of those who attended, alienating women who fell outside these categories.

Consistent with these internal tensions, my own experience at the Centre was of personal discomfort. In interacting with core workers and users, I seemed to evoke strong suspicion. From a research point of view, I knew that Centre workers preferred women researchers whose reports favoured their work and highlighted the racism and discrimination suffered by Irish women. I was very clear, however, that I wished to

produce something much more neutral. In my view I was open and friendly without committing myself to the women's views, and I asked questions designed to elicit as much information about the Centre's work as possible. I indicated clearly where I was doing my research and what it was about. Yet, I felt isolated, disapproved of and fought against a persistent discomfort when I visited. One of the workers, a second generation woman, who had been doing "committed" research herself asked me with some hostility "why" I was doing my research. In the tone of her questioning I felt that I had to prove my Irish credentials, which I resented.

In general, I felt forcibly aware of my Northern Protestantism, which seemed to me unacceptable in such an environment, unless demonstrably mediated by a conversion to republican views. I also felt distrusted by the lesbian women and acutely sensitive to my choice of clothes and make-up, and how these were being interpreted. A second generation Irish man told me of his experience, that once you proved yourself to the women in the Centre, all was well, but until then, they were suspicious. I felt that if I made the right sounds, which included support for republicanism, wholehearted backing of the women's work and aims, a promise to do "committed" research and if I left off my lipstick,<sup>8</sup> I might be approved of. I did not do any of these things. My personal reaction was to feel obdurate about acquiescing to what felt like an oppressively tight party line, and on both personal and

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<sup>8</sup> While this appears trivial, it seemed to have powerful symbolic significance.

research levels, I considered it a matter of integrity to remain aloof, rather than align myself with the dominant ideology.

I have said that I wished to produce neutral, not "committed" research. Was I "neutral"? I feel that my Northern origins inevitably affected this situation, both in my own reactions, and in the women's reactions to me. While I have endeavoured to write a balanced account, it is, therefore, an important part of the account to acknowledge my own personal reaction.

It is worth stressing at this point that other women at L.I.W.C. events confided their own discomforts in me. At conferences, when resolutions were passed on republican themes, the clapping and support seemed total, yet a number of women later told me they did not support these resolutions, but did not want to draw attention to themselves by objecting. Another woman complained to me of the "lesbian mafia" at the Centre. These revelations surprised me, as much because the women trusted me with their alienation, as because it had been previously concealed. My own experience was thus not merely my own experience, but a sharing in the experience of other informants (although not a replication of these experiences, as they varied in their intensity). In terms of research methodology, I could therefore be said to have been a participant observer in my emotional reactions as well as by my presence.

As with Aras na nGael, and indeed all Irish organisations, competition for funds lay at the core of much conflict and

hostility. Funding cuts were a particularly major issue at the L.I.W.C., with a 25% cut in 1988, followed by a threat of total funding withdrawal in 1990. This led to a "Save the Centre" campaign, lobbying councillors, alerting the press, appealing to the Irish community for support and circulating petitions. It was successful, but the same problem arose again in 1991. This time a joint campaign was launched between all five Irish groups then receiving funding from the London Boroughs Grants Scheme, which was again successful.

Nonetheless, cuts in L.I.W.C. media courses and other cultural activities ensued, and the tone of the mailings became subdued. Media resources had been a great source of pride for the Centre but as it became necessary to secure funding for each individual course, these decreased. Given these details, it is easier to understand the hostility L.I.W.C. members might feel towards any potential outside threat. I, for example, was in a position to publish material which did not have their interests at heart and could be damaging.

A further contextualising reflection, on the question of sexuality, is that tensions in women's groups between lesbian and heterosexual women are very common. Within the Irish community, furthermore, some lesbians perceived a conspiracy of silence about their existence. One Irish paper refused to print any advertisement with the word "lesbian" in it, I was told, while another refused to mention the word "Aids", due to its perceived connections with homosexuality. Anything which could upset "the Church" was completely avoided, Breda

resentfully informed me (see Chapter 5), and as many Irish organisations have church links, this influence was pervasive. (L.I.W.C. 1987:15) With few spaces for self-expression of both ethnicity and sexuality elsewhere, it is perhaps unsurprising that lesbians were keen to be prominent at the L.I.W.C. It is also unsurprising that it was not a prominence based on self-confidence, and was, therefore, easily threatened. Expressions of loyalty were thus required of outsiders to ease distrust. Such loyalty, as we have seen, is also demanded in N. Ireland.

The L.I.W.C. has, despite these difficulties, undoubtedly made an impact on women from all over London and contributed to the visibility and vibrancy of the Irish organisational scene. Its particular contribution has been to ensure that Irishness can be owned and celebrated by Irish women. Its success at attracting all kinds of Irish women has, however, been lessened by the strictness of the political agenda, which, as with B.A.I.S., contradicts its apparent openness.

#### **COMPARISON OF ORGANISATIONS**

All three of these organisations provided informants for me and contributed significantly to the London Irish, middle-class network (although not attracting exclusively middle-class support). They were all concerned with Irish culture and each claimed to be of unique importance within the Irish community. B.A.I.S. focused on academic respectability and on making Irish culture in a broad sense (politics, society, history) available widely and automatically to British and Irish students, as a legitimate source of study rather than as

a means of political protest. L.I.W.C. sought to promote Irish culture in the sense of "traditions" (music, dance, writing), particularly women's contribution; this had both a positive aim, to support Irish women, and a combative one, by which it represented an attack on sexist Irish, male-dominated society, and on anti-Irish British society.

In B.A.I.S, the conflicts seemed to co-exist more easily than in L.I.W.C. In dealing with governments and officials, B.A.I.S. pursued a 'respectable' role. They aspired to be politically neutral, and members held a wide range of political views. This enabled them to widen their attraction to individual members and to secure financial aid more readily from establishment sources. The L.I.W.C. had more in common with other militant, left-wing pressure groups, such as the Irish in Britain Representation Group, whereas B.A.I.S. would be more at home with the Irish of Eaton Square.<sup>9</sup>

Aras na nGael, lastly, aimed to provide a centre of excellence for the display of Irish culture in the sense of "traditional" music and dance, literature, theatre, sport and academic study. Like B.A.I.S. and unlike L.I.W.C., it aimed (1) to attract non-Irish as well as Irish people and (2) to eschew political division; however, it chose to achieve the latter

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<sup>9</sup> I refer here to "The Irish Club" based in Eaton Square and founded in 1950. This is a well-known haunt for professional Irish people and describes itself as a "prestigious Club in the heart of Belgravia... a focal point of activity which embraces culture, business and entertainment, as well as forming a meeting place which fosters relations between all". The clientele are described as from a "wide and diverse range of professions... musicians, poets, international financiers and bankers, fashion designers, artists, writers and actors". (Publicity leaflet, The Irish Club)

more by ignoring division than by highlighting and defusing it, which was B.A.I.S.'s approach.

All three organisations sought to expand the ambit of Irish culture, in different ways and variously defined, to make it more widely available and recognised. This is, as I indicate at the beginning of the chapter, part of a new development whereby self-assertive Irish groups focusing on culture and independent of the Church have been attracting middle-class Irish support.

All three organisations were, additionally, subject to conflict, internal and external. This conflict, I suggest, reflected divisions already existing within the Irish community, including class, politics, sexual orientation and gender. Each group fought to be "the" representative of "the Irish community", the best, the most politically correct or indeed the only representation worth choosing.

In this sense, the infighting between Irish organisations and the conflicts which existed within and between them represent a dynamic in which the nature of the Irish experience in London and of Irish ethnicity is disputed, and constantly re-defined. The more viable the alternative, the more savagely it is put down, as ownership of the blueprint of Irishness is fought over in many different arenas. This could be viewed as undermining that overall entity, "the Irish community", but can also be seen as a lively, challenging, never-ending debate which keeps the subject of ethnicity and what it really means in people's consciousness and helps to ensure it does not become a matter of indifference.

In the next chapter, I return to an individual focus, and will present my informants' representations of their ethnicity.



## CHAPTER 7

### REPRESENTATIONS

In this chapter, I wish to consider what my informants said about ethnicity. So far, I have considered what they said about whom they mixed with, and to what extent they chose ethnic companions at work, and particularly, in leisure. I have also observed and participated in these networks to some extent. Now, I wish to focus on the way in which ethnicity was represented, indeed created, by my informants' words, that is, how they talked about it in the abstract, in the realm of ideas. Hall (1990:236-37) suggests that identity is constructed within, not outside representation. Thus, representation is not just a flourish on the surface, or an escape into abstraction, but rather, contributes to our making of ourselves, or as Hall puts it, helps "to constitute us as new kinds of subjects".

I shall begin with a brief look at my informants' general representations, which drew attention to "real" and less real versions of Irishness; I will then move to the detail of specific topics. My informants' representations were complex and rich and I have divided them into a number of categories. These, I suggest, comprised some of the building blocks of their ethnicity.

The first topic is their recognition of the divisions within Irishness. This includes the differing ethnic labels which they used, the role of the border in their imagination, and the other ways in which differences were asserted. I then move to the comparison between Irishness and Englishness. I

will draw attention here to the way in which character and other differences were used to delineate identity, and consider what this and the preceding divisions tell us about my informants' identities and ethnic identities, and in particular what they reveal about us/them divisions. I will also, in this section, consider how being Irish in England differed from being Irish in Ireland, and will outline English attitudes to the Irish as perceived by my informants. I suggest that these were sometimes characterised by prejudice, and indeed racism, but that this was under-played by my informants due to the aspirations they held, including those relating to self-definition.

I shall move on from this to look at the role of the family, developing ideas which I began in Chapter 3 and arguing that the family had prominence for my informants' sense of identity; fourthly, I will consider Irish "traditions", drawing attention to how they were invented in order to identify Irishness. I shall finish with some brief case studies to give a flavour of how these four categories could interact and vary between informants.

Overall, my suggestion is that "Irishness" is heterogeneous, that it was manipulated and its varied constituent elements selected from to suit my informants' purposes, including their self-definitions. There was agreement on some broad elements of this identity, however, and its divisions, its difference from Englishness, the importance of the family and of "traditions" were the main categories which emerged.

## REPRESENTATIONS OF IRISHNESS

My informants felt that Irishness was something which could be defined correctly and most had quite clear ideas of how to do this. However, there was disagreement on the content of a "correct" definition. Some talked explicitly in terms of "real" Irishness, which seemed to be opposed to a counterfeit variety. Second generation Irish, known derisively by some as "plastic Paddies", were considered counterfeit by many. Informants who made such a distinction did not necessarily include themselves in the "real" category, however: some middle class informants placed working-class Irish here and Northern Irish Protestants were among those considering people from the Republic as more "real".

Scully (1994:276) also refers to a representation she encountered in fieldwork in the U.S.A., of the Irish in Britain as being "the real Irish". As well as there being a correct way to understand ethnicity, there were thus people, in her fieldwork as well as mine, who were considered to embody a pure ideal of Irishness in some way, who were thought to carry the cultural standard highest.

Dawson (1998) considers this idea in relation to "community", as I note in Chapter 1, suggesting that community is a symbol which can be manipulated, with some people representing themselves as more 'of' the community than others. He describes how two candidates vying to represent a club for elderly residents in a former coalmining town demonstrate this, one claiming to be more closely connected with the community through his involvement in mining than his rival,

who stressed his long residence in the town.

For most of my informants, birth in Ireland was represented as the bottom line. This was not enough to make one "real" in the idealised sense above, but it was seen by most as an essential beginning. When accompanied by growing-up experiences in Ireland, this was probably the most basic and irreducible part of ethnic identity for my informants, after which one could be graded to different degrees Irish.

Politics were emphasized by some, but on the whole, being politically "correct" was not considered essential. My informants were not passionate revolutionaries, but inclined to see complication in political matters, and often wanted to dissociate themselves. The political violence in the North was felt to be part of the identity and heritage my informants brought with them, especially those from the North, but could also be portrayed as an obstacle, something which got in the way of issues of identity, rendering them unimportant. This is ironic, given that the conflict could be said to be primarily about issues of identity. I return to this in Chapter 10.

I shall now move to more specific topics, beginning with the divisions my informants highlighted within Irishness.

#### **DIVISIONS WITHIN IRISHNESS**

There are three themes I wish to consider in this section. The first is the distinction between Irish, Northern Irish and British ethnic identifications among my informants; the second is the division between North and Republic; and the third concerns the range of other ways in which my informants

differentiated their compatriots into "them" and "us".

All of my informants wished to identify with an ethnic label. This was not always "Irish", however. I found that informants from the North, both Catholic and Protestant, also identified with "Northern Irish". A few Protestants from the North saw themselves as "British", and some Catholics from the Republic expressed an aspiration to be "British Irish". I shall now look at this in more detail.

Informants from the Republic tended to unproblematically identify themselves as "Irish" and to present this as a "fact" rather than a choice. However, a few of these wished to expand this to include a "British" element, as I indicate. This represented a desire to integrate and to expand the original ethnic identification to take account of experiences in the new country. "British Irish" was considered a difficult identity to claim, however, due to opposition from both Irish and British camps. I return to the topic of integration in Chapter 8.

Among informants from Northern Ireland, Catholics and some Protestants also identified themselves as Irish. Andrew, for example, a Protestant who had lived largely in N.I. but also in the Republic, expressed distaste for Protestants who insisted that they were British or even Northern Irish; he recommended a spell in Britain to challenge their assumption of kinship with the English.

Catholics and Protestants from Northern Ireland also espoused the identification "Northern Irish". This could be in addition to calling themselves Irish. Some, like myself, felt

"Northern Irish" was simply more accurate, but that both labels could apply. Others corrected people who suggested they were from "Ireland", stressing it was Northern Ireland. This did not correlate, as might be expected, with political aspirations or religious background. That is, those who favoured a united Ireland did not correspondingly favour a self-designation of Irish in preference to Northern Irish. Rather, most Northern Irish informants applied "Northern Irish" to themselves, but the extent to which they stressed this in preference to "Irish" seemed to relate more to personality, and how much my informants wished to assert themselves or challenge assumptions they encountered, rather than to political or other conviction.

For those informants who considered themselves British, others' views were particularly important, as they often encountered assumptions that they were Irish. For Protestants who had held proudly to a British identity pre-migration, this discovery, together with their own recognition that they were British in a different way to the English, could be painful and James, for example, described an experience of "crisis" around this issue.

The importance of others' attitudes is not confined to the English, however. I found that informants from the Republic who considered themselves Irish often assumed that Protestants from the North would see themselves as "British" and want nothing to do with Irishness or with Catholics. I did have some Protestant informants like this. Hugh, for example, considered himself British and designated the Irish as "scum".

Having known me prior to fieldwork, Hugh felt sufficiently comfortable to reveal that he found my willingness to call myself Irish bizarre, indeed could barely believe that I meant it. Was I saying it to wind him up, or as a research ploy, to fit in with my Catholic informants? Northern Irish was a more tolerable compromise for Hugh, but was not how he truly saw himself.

However, despite Hugh's strong views on his ethnic identification, he was willing to compromise in order to have a quiet life; thus, he rarely argued with people who called him Irish (something he described and which I also witnessed), and he did have Catholic, Irish friends, as the circle of Northern Irish Protestants he had emigrated with had extended to include these.<sup>1</sup> In this way, he diverged from the representation of Northern Irish Protestants forwarded by some informants from the Republic.

Furthermore, Hugh was actually in a minority among my informants, as other Protestants from the North showed much less attachment to the label "British". Some accepted the designation "Irish" when in London in recognition that they were not British in the way the English were. Others found "Northern Irish" as far as they could go in this direction. The majority tended to fall somewhere between Hugh and Andrew (as described on page 247) in their views. Thus, the idea that Protestants from the North did not wish to be Irish was a representation rather than an accurate description.

Most informants from Northern Ireland demonstrated situational

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<sup>1</sup> See "Paul"; Appendix 2.

ethnicity, in other words, instead of choosing one ethnic designation firmly (like Hugh), they forwarded whichever label seemed appropriate for the occasion. This varied according to how my informants assessed the situation, what goals they had, and what image of themselves they wished to forward.

Elizabeth, for example, a Northern Irish Protestant, told me that she described herself as "British" on official forms "because constitutionally, we are part of Britain". She referred to herself as "Irish" and also to the Irish as "them" on different occasions. When abroad she would describe herself as "British" except in France, where "Irish" is perceived more favourably, but she referred to herself as "Northern Irish" in England to dissociate herself from the I.R.A. ("Irish" was thus identified politically with terrorism for her.)

Elizabeth suggested that living in Britain had given her "perspective" on her ethnic and political points of view, but noted that she would never call herself "Irish" in Northern Ireland. In Britain, she was thus able to choose from a wider spectrum, according to what she evaluated as most appropriate and favourable for particular situations. Her criteria for choice were situation-specific and depended in part on others' opinions: what Elizabeth sought could be the most accurate, the most favourable, the least damaging, or the least parochial thing to be in differing circumstances.

Such a situational application was also shown by Catholics in Northern Ireland; for example, Alison told me,

"it depends on the situation that you're asked; you decide which one you want to be.. whether you're British



or Irish, you know".

I found this degree of situational assessment surprising, as the level of conflict in Northern Ireland, which I of course experienced first hand, led me to expect forceful defence of a single view of ethnicity.

However, Ruane and Todd, (1992; 1998) as I indicate in Chapter 3, demonstrate the complexities and flexibility which attach to ethnic designation and political position in Northern Ireland underneath the surface, subtleties I also encountered in my years there, so my informants' approach is in keeping with this understanding. The difference is, perhaps, that it is safer to assert such flexibility when one is outside Northern Ireland, and it therefore appears more readily. Two other factors are also relevant, I suggest: the youth of my informants and their class. Youth is a time when received wisdom is perhaps more readily challenged; and the middle-classes are, according to McFarlane (1986), less interested in sectarian division.

This situational variability represents, in Glazer and Moynihan's (1981) terms, "interest", in other words, a pragmatic assessment of the situation in relation to individual goals. In Goffman's (1971) terms, the individual is performing her ethnicity to suit the audience of the moment. What about the emotional attachment to these labels, however, which Glazer and Moynihan term the "affective" appeal of ethnicity? This is a question Wallman asks in relation to affective networks (see Chapter 2) and I shall deal with it next.

Firstly, my informants did not appear to feel any shame or guilt about their situational use of ethnic labels. The pragmatism which this shows may relate to the situation in Northern Ireland, where it can be dangerous to be Catholic in a Protestant area and vice versa, and where being able to conceal - or reveal - one's identity is an important survival skill. This skill has thus been adapted to life in London, where decisions are made less in terms of physical survival and more in terms of social ease. I demonstrated a version of this myself during fieldwork, as I indicate in Chapter 2.

My informants demonstrated emotional attachment to their ethnicity through a passion and commitment which may appear very at odds with their strategic manipulation and yet made perfect sense to me. Perhaps the fact that one has a sense of self-preservation and has learnt certain tactics to effect this need not detract from the feelings one has on another level about one's identity.

Some informants felt a clear attachment to one label (Irish, Northern Irish or British), although they might use two or more strategically. Others felt attached to two labels, for example Irish at some times and Northern Irish at others. No-one seemed to feel equal emotional attachment to Irish and British designations, even if claiming both. For informants from the Republic who desired to be British Irish, it seemed that the Britishness was to do with acceptance and integration more than emotional connection with a British identity per se. For Northern Irish Protestants who began to identify with a

degree of Irishness in addition to their proudly held Britishness, this could be as the result of a grudging acceptance of difference from the English.

Emotional attachment could thus change and expand. It is worth re-iterating that the emotional identification my informants felt did not hinder their capacity to choose a self-serving ethnic label when this was considered appropriate and as such, emotion and pragmatism appear to have been successfully kept separate.

The division between North and Republic, already evident in terms of the ethnic choices available in each area, was greatly emphasized by informants, to an extent I had not anticipated. I have already considered this in Chapter 3 and so will be brief here. While I was familiar with Protestants in Northern Ireland distancing themselves from the Republic, I did not anticipate that this would feature so strongly in other informants, or remain so forceful when in London. This view did not correspond to political orientation: both those who wished for a United Ireland and those who favoured integration with Britain expressed an attitude to the part they were not from which designated it very deeply as "other". This was, to recap, in terms of the different experiences which people in both areas had, the different characters which ensued from this, and the different identities which people held.

This sense of otherness within Ireland was thus very deep and not confined to Protestant Unionists, for whom it might appear political manoeuvring. It would seem that my informants from

all over Ireland brought this attitude with them to London and, despite in some cases mixing with people from the 'other' area, maintained such a view intact. The division between North and Republic would thus seem to have formed an integral part of what it is to be Irish/Northern Irish for the modern Irish migrant. This is similar to Borneman's (1992) findings on the impact of a divided Germany on German selfhood.

While this division was a crucial one, it was not the only way in which my informants divided their fellow ethnics into "them" and "us". Regional distinctions of other kinds were also made. In Ireland, regional stereotypes exist for Cork, Dublin and Kerry people as well as for Northerners, Ballymena and Belfast people. Kerry people are represented as slow and stupid, for example, Ballymena people as tight-fisted. There is also, as I indicate in Chapter 3, a strong sense of urban/rural divide. My informants brought these divisions with them. While, on a broad scale, the border was etched deep into my informants' consciousness, on a more minute scale, fellow Irish were thus considered to differ by virtue of their precise area of origin and the characteristics which were deemed to attach to this.

A range of other differences could be used to divide "them" from "us", however. "Them" could include people my informants felt ashamed of or wished to distance themselves from. This could be individual Irish people who embarrassed my informants by being loud or unpleasant; or terrorists who incurred approbation in England each time an atrocity occurred. (These were more experience-distant, of course.) Second generation

Irish were frequently associated with 'them', as were lesbians, men, those espousing Republican/Unionist politics; also, those who expected favours because they were Irish, or indeed those who denied favours, despite being Irish.

"Them" could also be an ideal picture of the Irish person, with what were perceived as negative characteristics. For some, the "stage Irish" person, who was prone to moodiness and alcoholism was the stereotype they placed in the "them" category. People tended to distance themselves from what were seen as (negative) stereotypes of Irish people, accepting that some did indeed behave like this and that it was embarrassing for themselves, who did not. Distancing is particularly important if one is close to a despised group, and so strong feelings were often expressed.

One of the categories of Irish people which most informants considered as "them" were those who made no attempt to integrate, specifically those who lived in areas like Kilburn. Martin, for example, talked of the "classic" type of Irish person in London, as,

"someone who doesn't want to.. experience London. They want to go to Irish clubs; they want to gravitate around an Irish priest in a parish; they want to associate with other Irish people; they don't want to be accepted by English people; they certainly don't want to be mistaken for English people; they want to retain their identity; they want to talk about being in Ireland; they want to drink a lot and talk about being drunk in Ireland; they want to listen to... the worst kind of Irish music... not quality music, not the sort of music, for example, that the Chieftains produce... They wouldn't have any interest in Irish art or Irish writing".

Such people were anathema to Martin (although I observed that he did share some of these characteristics); he himself

understood the difference in terms of class, suggesting that he was talking about "working-class people". This reveals another way of dividing one's compatriots into them and us.

In the "us" category, people usually included those who had integrated on a residential level, but those who assimilated too much, as it was perceived, changing name and abandoning accent, could be placed in with "them". In Martin's "us" category was "a much smaller Irish community in London" which he described as,

"an Irish professional, wealthy, business, rugby-playing and in some cases, powerful Irish class".

Often, however, those who were placed in some people's "us" category represented "them" for others, and as such, the content of these divisions was different for each individual. Irish lesbians, for example, were "us" for Breda, but "them" for some of her colleagues.

Irish ethnicity was thus experienced as fundamentally divided. This related to the political and territorial division of Ireland, but in addition to this obvious vehicle for difference, my informants also sought out other ways of dividing people in terms of "us" and "them".

These divides have often been transferred from Ireland to the experience in London, rather than emerging for the first time post-migration, but their meaning changes in Britain. For example, gay sexuality can be more freely expressed outside Ireland but the abhorrence and denial in evidence in some heterosexual Irish circles now has additional force: there is, I suggest, a desire among these groups to hide this

undesirable aspect of Irishness from one's hosts, lest 'the Irish' be tarnished with it; this is compounded by shame and confusion that the ethnicity one holds to so proudly can include such shocking deviations from one's own preferred image of it. Secondly, on the subject of class, middle and working-class Irish people tend to socialise in different places in London, unlike in Ireland, where the division is less rigid. In these two examples, divisions would seem to have become intensified, post-migration, although in different ways.

The proliferation of ways of dividing other Irish people into us and them may demonstrate that the binary opposition between North and Republic was not as absolute as Borneman's (1992) description of the mirror-imaging occurring in East and West Germany. Alternatively, the applying of "us" and "them" to other areas may indicate the ubiquity of such oppositional positioning in the search for identity. I shall now look at another example of this, namely the way in which Englishness was used to help define Irishness. I will follow this with further consideration of the meaning of us/them divisions.

#### **IRISHNESS IN RELATION TO ENGLISHNESS**

Despite the fact that London is a metropolitan city, characterised by a large number of minority ethnic inhabitants, it remained very much identified as "English" by my informants. A central aspect of the way they understood their experience was thus that they were now living among the English. This had significant implications for their senses of self, as an important part of being Irish/Northern Irish

for the majority of my informants was its opposition to Englishness.

This opposition was seen partly in terms of character differences. Irish people were seen as friendly, hospitable, spontaneous, open, passionate, and with a sense of humour. One informant referred to the friendliness of the Irish as "just in their nature". Sometimes these characteristics were stressed by themselves; at others, they were opposed to English characteristics of reserve, coldness, impassivity, being "easily offended". In general, the English were characterised by a lack of positive Irish attributes. Sometimes they were even seen, for example by Caroline, as exhibiting an entirely different set of norms.

Behaviours were also believed to differ. Rituals were singled out as an example: weddings were seen as more "crack" in Ireland than in England and funerals carried different customs, for example, the wake in Ireland. Ways of socialising were also seen as different. As with the rituals, this was bound up with character differences: the Irish were regarded as more friendly and spontaneous and able to relate to strangers in pubs (a male attribute), whereas English people were seen as taking longer to get to know, and unable to relax and have fun with people they didn't know. Paul told me that Northern Irish and Irish people,

"do place a lot of importance on going out and meeting people and listening to music and, you know.. they do enjoy having a good time... I don't know if English people do that just as much".

Some informants combined character differences with Irish cultural traits to understand the differences between Irish



and English people. For example, Martin suggested that the Irish were characterised by creative and musical traditions, monasticism, spirituality, warmth and openness and the English by a lack of all these. Spirituality was seen by many as a major difference between the Irish and the English, again, the Irish having it and the English lacking it.

The differences in character and behaviour between Irish and English people were connected by some informants with their different histories. For example, several people remarked that the English seemed less comfortable in Europe than the Irish, and highlighted English arrogance and complacency regarding other countries; this was related to their imperial history. In contrast, Paul suggested of the Irish that:

"I think they're just used to getting big knocks, got used to taking things as they come and going on".

A few informants spoke of historical differences in terms of differences between the Irish and English national "psyches".

Lastly, physical attributes were highlighted by some as another source of difference between English and Irish. Elizabeth stressed the distinctive appearance of the Irish and Caroline the "fossilised" appearance of the English. Pale skin, interestingly, was attributed to the Irish by Elizabeth and to the English by Caroline. In this single point, as with the wider picture, the principle of difference was agreed upon, but the content disputed.

In this way, the introduction of the concept of Englishness served to unify the representations of Irishness for my informants. When Englishness was "them", "us" as Irish people

became more positive and inclusive, although its content was still a source of divergent opinion.

However, my informants were sophisticated people and quite a number of them were keen to point out the inadequacies of generalising. I was reminded that not all English people were the same, that when one talked of "the English", it usually conjured up a middle-class, Southern English stereotype, whereas class differences and differences between North and South were considerable. The Northern English were seen as having more in common with the Irish (and Scots even more so). My informants could also proffer negative stereotypes about "the English" and "the Irish" and yet befriend individuals who were from these categories, demonstrating the distinction between the individual and the group in a less considered way.

Furthermore, while Irish and Northern Irish people were in general placed at a positive pole and English people at a negative one when the two were compared, this was not always the case. Northern Irish people were described by Paul as "clannish" and "wary". Irish society was criticised by several people for bigotry and repression and lack of freedom; in England, it was suggested, one could be more what one wanted and less what one was expected to be. English people were also complimented on their fairness and reliability once one overcame the reserve.

Some informants listed positive and negative attributes together for the Irish. Others, like James, a Northern Irish Protestant, were simply negative about the Irish. He referred

to people from the Republic as "Paddies" and "sheisters" and characterised them as lazy and unreliable and not as clever as they liked to think they were. He also characterised Northern Irish Protestant males as unpleasant and confrontational. Some informants talked of having more in common with English people with a similar background than with some Irish people. This is an important caveat, that shared background means what is held in common, with ethnicity only one aspect.

It is, however, noteworthy that most informants shared some concept of strong difference between Irish/Northern Irish and English, even if the content of the differences varied. Even for people who did not mix with Irish people or pursue culturally Irish activities, this aspect of being Irish remained important to them: it was in their character differences from the English that they remembered their sense of distinctive ethnicity, and even for those who were careful to try to avoid generalisations, this topic produced clear lists of perceived national characteristics.

It is also clear, however, that while my informants were ready to proffer positive stereotypes of the Irish in opposition to English qualities, Irish people were not in themselves seen as necessarily good. This could be dealt with by dividing the Irish into "us" and "them", as I have shown above, and locating the undesirable aspects of Irishness in "them". The divisions within the Irish community become clear here, as issues of gender, sexuality and class (among others) all arose to split the unified presentation which the spectre of Englishness evoked.

The identification my informants felt with their ethnicity, which was most clear when they compared it with what it was to be English, was thus complicated by the distance they felt from certain groups of Irish people, whose views, choices or social position were far from their own, but who remained, undeniably Irish. This led to some confusion and to considerable ambivalence towards a wholehearted identification with their compatriots.

Hall (1990:227-28) describes a similar situation in relation to Caribbean identities. Here, he suggests,

"the boundaries of difference are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference".

He believes that this indicates the inadequacy of the binary opposition of us/them in relation to Caribbean identities.

"At different places, times, in relation to different questions",

he continues,

"the boundaries are re-sited".

I suggest that my findings do not indicate the inadequacy of us/them divisions, but rather, the potential flexibility with which they are applied. Identity is inevitably a complex matter, but a shifting binary division between us and them makes, for my informants and I suggest for others too, an important contribution to this narrative of the self.

Englishness was not only something my informants used to define themselves as separate, however. It also infiltrated their sense of being Irish: they were now Irish in England and this differed from being Irish in Ireland. The most basic way it differed for most of my informants, was that their

ethnicity only began to take on meaning for them on leaving Ireland. At its most simple, this took the form of their increased awareness of its relevance, either to themselves or to others. This in turn could lead to different behaviours. Peter, for example, suggested that Irish people were friendlier to each other in England than they would be in Ireland, where they would be more inclined to take each other for granted. So, as being Irish became more self-conscious, my informants could appreciate others who shared this identity in a new way.

The meanings of ethnic markers were also re-evaluated and modified in the new context, it was suggested to me by informants from both North and South. For example, Deirdre, an Irish language teacher from the Republic, suggested that the Irish language assumed a political significance in London which it lacked at home. By this she implied that asserting one's Irishness in a way which excluded English people was a defiant and thus overtly political act. (It is of course already political in Northern Ireland because of the existence of opposing ethnicities there.)

Religious divisions were also related to differently. Stephen told me that Catholics and Protestants could mix easily "over here", for example in the "London Irish" rugby club, in a way that would be impossible in Ireland, specifically in the North. Ways of behaving thus changed as the meanings of these symbols changed.

My informants also perceived Irish people in Britain as differing from the Irish in Ireland. For some, they were more

negative, for example more pro-I.R.A., Caroline felt. For others, they were positive, more valued by their comparative scarcity, as in the example above.

However, as being Irish in Ireland is in itself a varying experience, (Ruane and Todd 1992; 1998) so the way in which being Irish in Britain affected my informants, also varied. Thus, those from Northern Ireland were more likely to have already considered the question of whether they were Irish or British. The oppositional nature of ethnicity is central here. In Northern Ireland, the two traditions have an 'other' against which they can refine their own senses of self. In Britain, Northern Irish people were presented with a new 'other' and, especially for Protestants who saw themselves as British, this could be, as I have indicated, disconcerting.

For informants from the Republic, Irish ethnicity was simply more (rather than differently) self-conscious in England. When the evening ends and the band prepares to pack up in Aras na nGael, the last tune to be heard is the Irish National Anthem, when everyone patriotically stands. This expression of national fervour is not paralleled in the Republic, where, as I suggested in Chapter 6, no-one would bother standing every night. It becomes more important to express one's national allegiance in a country where it is not taken for granted by everyone. Again, the oppositional aspect of identity comes into play, as Irish is defined in part by not being English.

I have looked at my informants' attitudes to "the English"

and to being Irish in England. I shall now look in more detail at their perceptions of English attitudes to them. Given the history of conflict between Ireland and England, I shall focus on the extent to which this was marked by hostility.

The phrase "anti-Irish racism" is popular among some Irish groups, such as the London Irish Women's Centre. Some Irish people I encountered felt strongly that this existed, and lamented the fact that it was taken so much less seriously than racism against black communities. Others considered that 'race' did not apply to the Irish and that anti-Irish racism was a product of an over-radical imagination.

However, many informants, even those people who derided this concept, described incidents to me which could be described as racist. This is similar to Scully's experience (1994:162-3) of her Irish informants denying the experience of racism and yet describing it. Thus, I was told stories of shops refusing to stock Irish cheese following the Deal bombing (in 1989), of my informants overhearing people criticising the Irish in post office queues, or on trains, and of their being told directly that "the Irish are all killers". Caroline said about the English:

"they don't like people with Irish accents; you get that feeling, you know - you're automatically excluded by quite a few people, which is.. devastating really".

Others spoke of the assumptions they felt were made about them, for example about their political beliefs or their occupation/class. Alan, an accountant, was frequently assumed to be a builder, as a number of Irish builders were working

locally, illustrating the expectation of working-class origin. English expectations and assumptions were thus experienced as limiting.

A very obvious way in which racism is perpetuated is through stereotypes. There was agreement among most of my informants that a stereotype of Irish people existed, portraying them as stupid, slow, violent, aggressive, alcoholic and unsophisticated. The Northern Irish or "Ulsterman" stereotype particularly emphasized aggression and violence, it was felt. Both seemed to be male, although no-one commented on this. Stereotypes were presented in jokes, which most found upsetting. Another method was through telling individuals that they were not "typically Irish". "What, do you expect me to have shamrock hanging out of my ear?" was one man's reported response to such a charge. A positive stereotype of the Irish also exists, emphasizing charm, blarney, literary excellence, but none of my informants discussed this. Thus, through direct experience of undermining incidents or limiting assumptions, or through stereotyping, my informants suffered prejudice because of their ethnicity.

How did my informants react to stereotyping and prejudice? Responses varied between and within individuals, according to mood: from challenging offensive remarks, to joking along with them, to "understanding" why they were made. Depression and anger and a sense of being "constantly undermined" were also reported. Sometimes people reported fear, for example, feeling "afraid" to speak after a bombing, or frightened of what people might say. Mary felt afraid to become involved in



political activity because of its popular association in the English mind with terrorism, she said. She feared being arrested or having a file kept on her.

Yet, my informants underplayed the role of racism and prejudice. Some reported the opposite, being surprised by how pleasant the English were. For a number of informants, living in London was a liberating experience: for example, Paul and Alison, a mixed marriage couple, rejoiced that they could choose British or Irish identities, without pressure. Other informants also felt that it was advantageous to be Irish in England, that one could succeed more easily than in Ireland. Martin suggested this was because you could get away with more because you were Irish and Maria that because Irish people were so much brighter, it was easier to succeed in England where there were fewer of them to compete with. Martin noted that Irishness was only advantageous if one was above a certain level, implying middle-class, which is certainly an important factor.

Regarding discrimination, if this can be defined as prejudice which is acted upon in order to deny opportunity, my informants were even less inclined to complain. Although one woman felt discrimination had affected her career, if others felt that they had suffered career impairment, they were more likely to attribute it to other sources, such as personality clashes or Oxbridge snobbery.

Scully investigates the issue of whether Irish migrants have been subject to racism, focusing on her informants in Britain and the U.S.A. She suggests that Irish people are perceived

and also perceive themselves as

"invisible to expressions of racism" (1994:161)

and reminds us that visibility is socially constructed. She also points out that there are a number of ways of experiencing racism. While the Irish have not been subject to institutional racism in the way that black communities have, they are still, she suggests, racially categorised as inferior. Thus, ascribing derogatory traits, such as drunkenness, as the inherent property of a group of people is an example of racism. (Ibid:166, 177) It is, she suggests, a mark of the success of this strategy that its representations are seen as "natural" rather than stereotyping. For example, working as a bar proprietor is seen as a "natural" occupation for the Irish (1994; 1997) because of their stereotypical association with alcohol.

I would agree with Scully that Irish migrants are subject to racism which is more subtle and less acknowledged than that experienced by black communities. I suggest that it is important that this experience is integrated into current understandings of racism in order to expand our understanding of the variety of ways in which it can operate.

As to why my informants did not acknowledge this racism, one factor is that this prejudice is more subtle than that directed towards black communities, a point also made by Scully. (1994:179) In relation to this, a number of informants reported that they had originally discounted prejudice, but over the years "realised" how insidious and pervasive it was.

Scully (1994:170) also points out that diversity of experience is characteristic of any group of people, and the Irish are not a homogeneous group, all believing that they are victims of racism, or indeed, all experiencing it. This is an important caveat. My informants, furthermore, being middle class, may have encountered less prejudice than other migrants.

However, Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power also helps us to understand why my informants did not acknowledge the racism they experienced. Symbolic power can only be exercised, he suggests,

"with the complicity of those who do not want to know they are subject to it". (1991:164)

I suggest that my informants exercised complicity with this through denying the racism which was one of its expressions, and that this was because of their goals and aspirations, namely to be successful and accepted. To recognise such an example of powerlessness and non-acceptance and assume the role of victim would have compromised such a positive self-image. They may also have associated this complaint with migrants whom they considered to be political. This too would have compromised their self-definitions: as I show in Chapter 10, my informants wished to dissociate themselves from such an image. Thus, my informants had compelling reasons to play down racism. Given the representation of racism as a black issue, it was easier for them to assert that these experiences did not apply and for this to be believed.

#### **FAMILY**

My informants' families were in the main located in Ireland.

As most had not established families of their own, the families from which they came "over there" remained their paramount experience of this sort. However, for some, as I have indicated, family members were now "over here", that is, with them in London, and providing important support.

I noted in Chapter 3 that family was important to my informants as a locus for identity and as a source of practical assistance. It was in the family that they learned who they were and for many, it was their family they missed most about Ireland. However, my informants had also experienced their families as negative and restrictive in Ireland. In this section, I shall develop these ideas through looking more closely at my informants' views.

Elizabeth's family was a central reason why Northern Ireland was important to her:

"It's just, I mean, I was born there and that's where my family are, so that's why it's important but if.. if I was born in Scotland, I think, sorry, this sounds like a traitor, but I'd probably feel.. because that's where my family were, I'd probably feel attached to it, but because mine are from (name of town), that's where my whole epicentre is".

Elizabeth spent most of her holidays visiting home to see her family, so they were kept uppermost in her mind, and she sometimes talked warmly to me of what they would be doing at particular times. Other informants stressed the importance of the family in times of crisis. One man said his family would be the last people he would turn to in a crisis, as they would usually be the ones who had prompted it, but more people found families valuable in times of trouble. They were thus experienced as having practical advantages.

Some informants talked about raising their own children. Stephen, one of the few informants with a child, told me he had insisted on his daughter being born in Ireland so she could be fully Irish and not simply "descendant Irish". He wanted to pass on Irish "traditions" and knowledge to her, for example, sending her to Irish dancing classes. Others, talking theoretically about whether they would prefer to bring up children in Ireland or London, had differing views, and some pointed out that the nationality of their - hypothetical - partner would affect their decision; on the question of whether they would consider it important to transmit knowledge of Irishness to their children, most felt that they would want to do this, although the extent varied, from informal conversations about 'home', to dancing classes and Irish language lessons.

My informants, young adults, had spent the largest part of their lives in Ireland living with their families, and these families were emphasized as a source of early learning. Formative experiences and discoveries occurred in this context which my informants either wished to remember, or simply felt were inescapably part of their experience. Related to this, family are a vital channel for information on ethnicity, especially for Irish children born outside Ireland, and, more generally, for discovering who one is. Again, my informants can to some extent select what they wish to support or reject from early teaching - as well as what they would like to pass on to their own children - but to deny all early experience was not a choice of any. Remembering upbringing in Ireland

is, I suggest, a necessity for psychological health, as denying formative experiences is emotionally costly.

Thus, the family was experienced not only as the source of early learning, but as influencing personal development in an ongoing way, as this process continued after adulthood. In fact, as suggested previously, migration can be seen as an opportunity to work through early developmental experiences and to evaluate them at a distance.

As part of this ongoing process, families provided a continuing and important link with Ireland for most of my informants, the stimulus to visit and continue contact. For some, they would even provide an incentive to return permanently. Their importance was thus far from being located only in the past, but provided instead an ongoing connection with a sense (and experience) of self which remained located in Ireland. The importance of family, while encompassing the ethnic specificity of one's upbringing, could, arguably, be seen as of greater importance than this ethnic location. However, the fact remains that the two did coincide, and each powerfully affected the experience of the other.

### **"TRADITIONS"**

"Tradition", Herzfeld suggests,

"is the nourishment of national identity". (1997:92)

Many of my informants spoke to me of their involvement and interest in Irish "traditions", by which they and I mean Irish "traditional" music, dancing, language, literature and sport. These were also referred to as important by others who did not practice them.

Once again, the division between North and Republic of Ireland was evident in such conversations. Caroline told me that on a visit to Northern Ireland, she noticed that "Irish" (i.e. Catholic) people there were much more interested in the "traditions" than people in "Ireland" (the Republic). In the Republic, consumerism had replaced this preoccupation, she thought. By contrast, I found that conversation about Irish "traditions" came much more readily to my informants from the Republic and seemed to be a "natural" part of the Irish identity for them. Many of them had been to Irish dancing classes as children and as the Irish language is compulsory in the Republic, a rudimentary knowledge of this was usual.

Most informants, however, agreed that "traditions" constituted a part of the Irish identity whether or not they themselves pursued any of them and whether or not they classed themselves as Irish. I expected to find alienation among Northern Irish Protestants towards Irish "traditions". As Ruane and Todd (1998:178-203) have pointed out, Catholic and Protestant cultures, of which "traditions" form a part, are composed of quite separate elements. Those who saw themselves as British and not Irish did indeed see Irish "traditions" as something outside their heritage and as something belonging to Catholics. However, the two Protestants in my set of 13, who saw themselves as Irish, had taken part in Irish dancing as children and were surprised that I should find this unusual. Andrew referred me to Protestant Irish music on the Antrim coast, pointing out that "traditional" music was not only

Catholic heritage. (See Appendix 2.)

These "traditions" were thus very clearly associated with what it was to be Irish, both by Catholics and by Protestants who saw themselves as Irish; those Protestants who distanced themselves from the "traditions" on the grounds that they were Irish were also backing this view.

People emphasized different aspects of the "traditions" according to their interests. For example, Stephen, who played rugby with the "London Irish" Rugby Club, was very interested in Irish sport and in supporting Ireland in sporting events.<sup>2</sup> Caroline, who wrote poetry herself, emphasized the literary "traditions"; when asked what "being Irish" meant to her, she answered:

"I guess.. the first thing that would come into my head, like, is that there's a great oral tradition which later turned into a great literary tradition, so I think.. that aspect of the creativity is quite strong in the culture and I think it's a part of most people, that sort of literary impulse".

The "traditions" were, I suggest, a resource, people drawing what they wished from them, and some feeling no need to access them at all, but still finding it important that they were there. This has a wider application: ethnicity in general also provides a wide range of meanings from which people select according to their needs and preferences.

However, it is impossible to talk of "traditions" without referring to Hobsbawm and Ranger, (1995) whose dissection of

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<sup>2</sup> Lest sport be under-estimated, note Margusee's view (4/7/95) that, "outside war zones, sporting teams are today the main visible bearers of national identity... the confusions and prejudices attending the whole question of national identity in a global economy are refracted through sport".



the "traditional" draws attention to the frequency with which practices which are presented and experienced as ancient "tradition" have in fact been a comparatively recent development. The Scottish kilt, introduced by an English Quaker as late as 1746 is a case in point. (Trevor-Roper 1995:21) The importance of this construction of a "traditional" past for a nationality is such that Hobsbawm (1995:14) states, "the national phenomenon" simply "cannot be adequately investigated" without "careful attention" to it.

One of the signs that tradition is being invented is, he suggests, the existence of movements aiming to revive traditional practices. After all, he points out,

"where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented". (Ibid:8)

The Gaelic revival movement in Ireland, aiming to revive the use of the Irish language, sport, dancing and other Irish traditional practices, would seem to indicate that the invention of tradition has been important in Ireland, as part of the construction of a self-conscious, cohesive ethnic identity in the 20th century. This perhaps stemmed from confusion attending to modernisation and the sense that what was distinctively Irish was being lost and needed to be controlled and promoted or it would disappear for ever. In a time of change, such "traditions" can also be an important stabilising force.

Another manifestation of the invention of tradition, Cannadine (1995:105) suggests, is when the meaning of "traditions" change even while the text remains the same. I would suggest

that this too has happened with the Irish "traditions", which have moved beyond spontaneous cultural expression to a more self-conscious role, where they symbolise Irish ethnicity and its distinctiveness, both within Ireland and outside it. For my migrants, who have experienced great change, this role is of particular importance and this is why even those who do not involve themselves in such practices still see them as important. Traditions are, thus, (re-)invented in order to assist in the process of identifying Irishness. The vital point here is that the idea of the distinctiveness of Irishness is considered worth emphasizing (in a sense, through whatever means are at hand). Thus, referring to Irish "traditions" can appear "natural" as I suggest above, but this does not mean these additional layers of meaning are absent.

#### CASE STUDIES

I shall now look at a small number of case studies to illustrate some of the various combinations of factors which were possible among my informants.

Elizabeth, whose ethnicity varied situationally as I describe above, ascribed an emotional priority to being Northern Irish. British was something she was, a fact, whereas Northern Irish was something she felt. She also noted that she felt "more kin" with the Irish than the British. So what did being Northern Irish mean to her? She told me,

"it's coming from a small community where you know a lot of the same places or maybe the same people. It means, inevitably it means this religious divide ... whether you're one or the other. It also means having value in your life, family and.. community, I think. I come from a farming community.. so I find rural communities much more identifiable to my.. raison d'être".

She also spoke of looking Irish and of people recognising that she was Irish before she even spoke. "It must be this pale, anaemic skin and the general lack of sophistication", she suggested. In general, she felt inferior because of her origins, in particular because of the association with violence in Northern Ireland, and this was especially disadvantageous in relationships, she felt. She suggested she might prefer to have been Scottish as there were no "Troubles" there, but expressed guilt about this, as if betraying something important, and contradicted it by declaring that she was "very proud" of her "roots".

Elizabeth drew me a Venn diagram to illustrate how she saw Irishness. The Republic was constituted by a large circle and Northern Ireland by a small circle, intersecting. In the overlap between the two were, she suggested: St. Patrick, who had cleared the snakes from all of Ireland and originated in Down, although he was, she felt, appropriated by the Republic rather; and the passion and intensity of the Irish, their shared physical and psychological characteristics.

For Breda, a Catholic from the Republic, Irishness seemed to have two poles (see Appendix 2): at the negative end, male, middle-aged, middle-class and conservative Irish, and at the positive end, female, working-class and lesbian. Breda, as I have noted, was herself lesbian and most of her friends were Irish women, many lesbian. She felt, I would suggest, both rejected by and rejecting of those at the negative end of this continuum, but her positive experiences of Irish women militated against a complete rejection of Irishness. She thus

felt a profound ambivalence.

Martin, a Catholic from Dublin, told me that "being Irish" was,

"one national identity - at a simple level - it's a label, with certain associations - for people that you meet, they can assume certain things about you. On the positive side, it's being associated with the good things about Ireland; music, writing, theatre, culture, Christianity, missionary work... Then it's about being associated with a certain history, a struggle, a difficult history.. a new found freedom that was.. hard fought for, an identity that... cost blood and... that's important".

Mary, next, said that being Irish for her was partly,

"about being confident about who I am.. irrespective of what other people may think of me as a person or... a member of a group".

This related to her having begun by feeling ashamed of aspects of her Irishness - pronunciation of certain words which produced ridicule from English people, for example - and having progressed to recognising that this was an aspect of who she was and feeling that the appropriate reaction was to be proud of it. She was helped by knowing people from black communities and being impressed by their pride in their heritage, she said.

Stephen, finally, said that he happened to be born in Ireland and loved the place, that was all. Although he had nationalist views, these were not essential, he suggested, to Irish ethnicity. The fact that he knew me to be Protestant may have influenced this statement, however.

In a biennial conference organised by B.A.I.S., Seán, a Northern Irish speaker, suggested that the search for how to be "properly" Irish and for a static, fixed identity was counter-productive and resulted in generating stereotypes. He

felt attitudes were changing in Northern Ireland, to accept the "fluidity" and "impermanence" of identity and literary expressions of ambiguity. While this accords with my findings on the situational variability of ethnicity, paradoxically, my informants were also inclined to proffer static visions of a clear and "correct" view on what it was to be properly Irish. Yet, even these fixed views varied in a way which created an overall picture of fluidity and diversity, illustrated by the examples I have given.

My informants selected from their ethnic heritage the elements which made most sense to them, to present themselves favourably to a particular public and also, crucially, to themselves. Within the limits of what was collectively considered possible, they thus chose, in an individual and creative way, what seemed to be of most relevance to their lives, the resulting picture being a fascinating mosaic of sometimes clashing colours. Some emphasized cultural heritage, others personal development, natural surroundings, or other people. Emphasizing ethnicity was thus not necessarily at the expense of individuality, a situation which suited my informants perfectly.

In the next chapter, I shall analyze in more detail what the importance and meaning of ethnicity was to my informants, in terms of both their representations and their actions. I shall begin by considering the extent to which they sought to integrate, and what happened to their ethnic attachment in this context.

## CHAPTER 8

### ETHNICITY: THE OVERALL PICTURE

So, what did ethnicity mean to my informants? Overall, what value did it have? In this chapter, I shall consider whether the term "ethnicity" is relevant or necessary to sum up the constituent elements which I considered in the previous chapter. I shall suggest that it is. I will ask whether ethnicity was important to my informants. In asserting that it was, I will focus on the contradictions which formed an integral part of my informants' presentations of their ethnicity. I shall present a number of ways of understanding these contradictions which show that they do not indicate the unimportance of the ethnic heritage.

I will distinguish between unconscious behaviour and consciously chosen words, and between strategic choice and emotional bond, arguing that ethnicity can be compelling on a number of levels, but for my informants, not on all levels at once. I shall conclude by considering what, overall, ethnicity meant for my informants, and what functions it served. I will examine the role that culture played in this. To begin with, however, I will consider the topic of integration, focusing first on what the literature has to say and then moving on to my informants.

#### **INTEGRATION**

In this section, I shall consider what integration and assimilation means in the literature and to my informants. I shall suggest that my informants favoured an integration which allowed for the retention of their ethnic identity, and for

the expression of their individuality. I shall then look in more detail at my informants' perspectives, noting the extent to which conflict between and within individuals was characteristic of this subject. I will, lastly, consider what was said and done about accent, a key marker of Irish ethnicity, before summing up.

In the literature, "assimilation" has entailed a loss of identity. Early theories saw it as entailing complete absorption of the migrant, a process, Eisenstadt (1976:46) suggests, which entailed the individual immigrant learning new roles, transforming primary group values and extending participation beyond primary group and into the "main sphere of the social system". Banton (1972:18) pointed out that this understanding failed to take account of both how the host society was changed by the process and also how distinctive features of the minority members could be retained.

Horowitz, (1981:115-6) writing only slightly later, suggested a more subtle understanding of assimilation, by which it could be divided into two types, amalgamation and incorporation. In the former, two or more groups unite to form a larger new group; in the latter, one group loses its identity by merging into another group (which retains its identity). He also opposed this to the option of differentiation, whereby additional groups are created, either through division (where a group separates into component parts) or proliferation (where a new group forms a separate existence without its "parent group" losing its identity).

Writers agreed, however, that the ethnic identity with which

the migrant arrived was lost, and a new identity taken on; this was considered to be as desirable as it was inevitable. Van den Berghe, for example, saw assimilation as a prerequisite for upward social mobility, with

"assimilation and acculturation..symbols of successful attainment of middle-class status". (1981:226)

Eisenstadt suggested that successful assimilation was necessary in order for the migrant to become "a fully-functioning member of society" (1976:46) and Wirth (cited in Cohen 1978; 7:379-403;392) saw it as the ultimate goal, a way of reducing inequality between minority groups and the majority population. Wirth thus assumed that inequity was a necessary characteristic of ethnic difference, and seems also to have assumed that no other kind of difference had the kind of resonance and outcome of ethnic differentiation.

Theorists began, however, to move away from the concept of assimilation, as it became clear that it did not adequately describe the reality in many cases. Ideas around integration and pluralism were favoured instead. The concept of integration challenged the loss of identity which assimilation assumed, by suggesting a more partial adaptation (although this was not Brown's view, 1970:209). Indeed, Rapport (1998:79), drawing on Weingrod, suggests that

"cultural assimilation and heightened ethnicity are quite compatible trends; in fact, their linkage may be inevitable".

Eriksen makes a similar point. (1993:124)

On the question of why groups assimilate or fail to assimilate, there has been a debate over how much this relates to cultural and historical factors, and how much to structural



and power issues. The question of whether one focuses on individual choice or structural constraint is related to this. Different analyses resulted depending on which factors were emphasized and whether, as Kuper (1976:271) put it, the unit of integration was seen as the individual or the ethnic group.

Schermerhorn, provides an example of an analysis from the perspective of the ethnic group. He suggested that relations with the host society could be understood in one of two ways. According to the first approach, which originates in system analysis, they are characterised by:

"a series of adaptive adjustments regulated by the norms and values of (the host society's) institutions that eventually become internalized by members of the ethnic group involved". (Ibid:92)

Integration, by this definition is a

"process whereby units or elements of a society are brought into a more active and co-ordinated compliance with the ongoing activities and objectives of the total society at any given period of time". (Ibid:97)

The second possibility Schermerhorn discusses is represented by power-conflict theory, which views each ethnic group as being

"in an embattled position, fighting for its life, its identity, or its prestige, subject to perpetual constraints that threaten its survival, its freedom, or its life chances in a precarious world." (Ibid:92)

His suggestion is that these two processes are dialectically connected to each other, so that a synthesis of both integration and conflict presents a more accurate way of understanding what actually happens.

Van Niekerk (1995:118-9) suggests that reference to both structural and cultural perspectives is needed for a complete

analysis. Implicit in his work, which considers the differing success rates of those he calls 'Hindustanis' and Creoles in Surinam, is the suggestion that explanations wholly in terms of cultural factors can involve blaming an ethnic group for failures which are portrayed as attaching to their cultural values, when their difficulties may relate instead to adverse social structural conditions. This reminds me of my upbringing in Northern Ireland, where I encountered Protestants who attributed Catholic disadvantage to their inferior cultural attitudes rather than to power issues; this explanation, of course, absolved Protestants of responsibility to change these structures.

Lindo (1995:144, 160-1) also suggests that we pay attention to both cultural and situational factors, as in his view it is impossible to establish empirically which is paramount. He examines Penninx's 1993 model, which suggests that there are two, complementary aspects of attaining a social position in society: position acquisition, from the individual's perspective, and position allocation, resulting from structural factors. Applying this model to Portuguese and Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, Lindo modifies it usefully by reminding us that social structural constraints apply within the post-migration community as well as being imposed from outside it. He thus emphasizes diversity within the group, and also highlights the role of change.

My own view, resulting from a combination of literature analysis and fieldwork, is that "integration" involves adaptation rather than absorption and thus, that ethnic

identity can still be maintained if adaptation is favoured. It is self-evidently important to pay attention to both cultural and individual perspectives and also to structural constraints, both within the ethnic group and outside it. However, the existence of structural factors does not preclude their being interpreted and interacted with in an individual way. This varies according to the individual's position in "the field", as Bourdieu would phrase it, as well as according to personal history and attitudes, and this is subject to change.

Systems analysis, I suggest, fails to leave sufficient space for this creative, manipulating individual, regulating her according to more general norms and processes. However, Schermerhorn's combination of compliant, unproblematic adaption with a more conflict-ridden model in which power is wielded and contested, is interesting. I suggest that integration for my informants could contain elements of gentle, untroublesome adaptation and also conflict. This accords with my definition of ethnicity as potentially involving conflict and contested definitions.

I also suggest that integration can take place on a number of different levels, for example work, leisure and relationships, rather than being something which either happens or fails to happen, and that each of these areas can be characterised by different motives and constraints. As Lindo (1995:159) points out, the extent to which the "cultural stuff" is retained depends on its relevance in the new community, and this will not be experienced in a homogeneous way.

Moving specifically to my informants, what did "integration" mean to them? Predominantly, it entailed a willingness to mix with English people, and secondly, it involved adapting to English culture and norms. Their preoccupation was not in ascertaining which areas to integrate with and which not, but rather, the more general dilemma of whether it was appropriate to integrate, and indeed, whether it was possible. Most of my informants expressed a desire to "fit in" and be accepted in British society, and looked down on those migrants who refused to compromise in this way, retaining wholly Irish companions and values. They thus approved in principle of integration.

Regarding mixing with English and other non-Irish people, this was expressed particularly in the area of residence. The majority of my informants felt that residential integration was highly desirable, as I show in Chapter 5, and demonstrated this in their actions. There was also a class dimension in this as Kilburn was particularly disapproved of as a place to live, and this was, as I have suggested, related to its working-class image as well as its preponderance of Irish migrants. Irish neighbours were thus divided into "us" and "them", with some more desirable than others.

In other areas too, this willingness to mix with non-Irish people was demonstrated in my informants' actions, as I have shown in earlier chapters, and also stated explicitly. It could be coupled with a judgemental attitude to those migrants who made alternative choices: for example, Colm spoke of those who refused to mix with non-Irish people as "savages". Others

were more subtle but still disapproving.

I suggest that this consensus on the importance of mixing with non-Irish and specifically English people related to my informants' desires to define themselves as sophisticated, flexible and open to new experiences. They had left Ireland to explore new vistas and did not wish to narrow their horizons by placing limits on those with whom they could mix.

In terms of adapting to English culture and norms, my informants were willing to do this to a limited extent. (See Appendix 9 for a case study which illustrates this.) However, they were very clear that they also wished to adhere to Irish culture and norms. To change in a way which seemed to compromise a continuing Irish or Northern Irish identification was considered undesirable for most informants and thus this area of integration was experienced as more problematic. While some were willing to define themselves as "British Irish", I suggest that what this indicated was my informants' aspirations to be recognised as Irish but to retain English friends and be accepted by English people as an equal.

My informants were thus ready to be flexible and respectful in relation to English culture and norms and to adapt to them, but not willing to adopt them wholesale in preference to the culture and norms of their upbringing. Thus, the concept of assimilation, in terms of complete absorption, was not appropriate to them. Instead, they were more inclined to assess both cultures for relevance and acceptability, retaining Irish/Northern Irish customs and attitudes when they

valued them, and rejecting those which caused them difficulty. This was part of their general interest in forming their own individual identities which they felt at ease with and which most accurately represented whom they wished to be. Integration was something which occurred along the way, to the extent that it fitted in with their individual assessments of what values they preferred to adhere to. Thus, while there was a general consensus that integration was positive, the way in which this occurred varied for each individual, as each chose those elements of their culture which they valued and also adopted those English practices and customs which appealed to them. (Again, see Appendix 9 for an illustration of this.)

The strength of feeling my informants had about this issue, the extent to which they were prepared to mix with non-Irish people, or take on new values and norms, varied between informants. I shall give some examples now. John insisted that a "British Irish" identity was possible, Caroline insisted that it was not, although she later changed her mind. Even the L.I.W.C., always keen to promote Irish culture as visible and positive, in a report from their Emigration workshop at the 1989 Annual Conference, suggested that integrating was "good", yet the woman reporting added that it should not preclude the idea of having an Irish community.

Some informants referred to entirely anglicised people they knew with disapproval. The person closest to denying all Irish links was Thelma, a Northern Irish Catholic, who tried

to sound English when with English people and on one occasion denied being Irish in my presence, but who, when mixing with Irish family and friends, also enjoyed remembering her Irish origins and reverted to her original accent.

Disapproval of alternative strategies to one's own could be strong, with feelings running high. Differences could even be seen within families. The O'Connell family, for example, were split on gender lines on the question of integration, the female members (including Thelma) favouring losing one's Irish accent and loyalties, the men holding more strongly onto them. This led to the women referring to their brothers as uncouth, and the brothers finding their sisters snobbish. (See Appendix 2.) Even these sisters, the most anglicised of my informants, mixed heavily with their family in London and had striking moments of nostalgia for their roots. The conflict was thus over what degree of remembering and evoking of Irishness was considered appropriate (in this case, within family get-togethers or in the wider world).

My informants were also aware of structural constraints and how these impinged upon them. They often complained that it ought to be easier to combine both ethnicities, but that both British and Irish people made it difficult. The difficulties of acceptance in both Irish and English worlds led some informants to lament that they fitted in neither, a painful situation. As Borneman (1992) has pointed out, naming and categorising are important power issues. My informants may call themselves "British Irish" or some other ethnic definition, but the extent to which such self-definitions gain

currency is determined by others.

The topic of how much adaptation to the host society is desirable or acceptable is obviously one which is considered important by my informants and which produces conflict. Conflict can exist on a number of levels: firstly, between the desire to remember and remain in touch with one's ethnic heritage, which my informants were keen to do, and the desire to fit in with their new society and be accepted there. This is experienced as a conflict of identity - whether to choose an Irish or British identification or attempt to bridge both. Negotiating a more inclusive ethnic identity, as many of my informants did post-migration, could provoke hostility from compatriots, and thus the symbolic and internal conflict of identity was concretised and externalised in conflict between individual Irish migrants. Identity is thus both internal and relational.

This conflict was experienced differently depending on whether my informants were from the North or the Republic. For those from Northern Ireland, the conflict migrated with them, but changed in its expression in Britain: Protestants who saw themselves as British thus had, to some extent, to take on a new attitude, which incorporated their Northern Irish origins. Ruane and Todd (1998:202) suggest that Protestants in Northern Ireland fear contact with Irish culture as this could lead to assimilation. Maintaining their ethnic identity thus requires separation from Catholics. In London, Protestants found themselves associated with Irish culture regardless of whether or not they identified with it or mixed with Catholics, and



this clearly changed the situation for them. Catholics were, as Alison put it, more free to call themselves British if desired than they would have been in Northern Ireland; although this would not necessarily be granted recognition in Britain, it would not carry the same emotive connotations of betrayal as in N.I.

In the Republic, as "Irish" was the label which my informants felt was indisputably theirs, to take on a degree of Britishness could seem like a backward step for a nation whose independence was relatively recent. Thus it could provoke ideas of betrayal and was problematic for my informants to embrace. To claim a degree of Britishness was anathema to certain fellow migrants, who saw the English as the historical enemy and as continually anti-Irish. These were the kind of problems my informants faced, both within themselves, and embodied in other Irish migrants.

One way in which the choice to emphasize and remember Irishness and/or favour integration is visible, is through accent. Accent was the most obvious marker of ethnicity for my informants. It was when they spoke that they were placed as Irish. As Martin put it, reporting a joke he had enjoyed,

"the thing about being Irish in England is that they don't realise you're black until you open your mouth".

Or, as Scully, (1997:392; 1994:268) quoting Bourdieu, suggests, the authenticity of Irish status is apparent through the "bodily hexis" of accent. Thus, choices made about accent relate intimately to the question of integration and I shall look at this issue in some detail now.

Even though the language spoken in their new country was the

same as in Ireland, a major issue for my informants was the difficulty they experienced in communicating. Partly, there was a difficulty in understanding some English accents, but most complained about not being understood themselves. Particular numbers and letters were mentioned as problematic: '14' sounding like '40', and 'th' being problematic for those from the Republic; problems with the number '8' and the letters 'e' and 'a' were reported by Northerners. Particular words were also different. Mary told me that she used to say "the press" at home, whereas people said "cupboard" here, so could not understand her. Word order could also be different, taken from the Gaelic, causing teasing for apparently ill-ordered wording.

The majority of my informants complained about the difficulties of being understood, particularly initially, and the embarrassment of having to repeat things endlessly. Most found this extremely annoying. Conversations on the telephone were particularly problematic. This reminds us not to underestimate the extent of the differences that can exist even within a shared language.

However, in comparison to the differences between languages, they remain, in Akenson's terms, (1988) "small differences". What is interesting is how these differences were responded to. My informants did not feel that their ways of speaking were very different but rather that their accents were used on occasions to make them feel like outsiders, as they were forced to repeat everything they said regardless of how clearly it was spoken. In my early days in London I

experienced this frequently, to my considerable frustration. My informants, in contrast, felt that this kind of behaviour was confined to individuals, who were seen as atypically offensive. They also reported that people imitated their accents, however, and were more inclined to express irritation at this.

My informants employed a number of strategies to deal with people's reactions to their accents. These included: speaking more loudly, slowly, clearly and carefully and selecting different words on occasion. This was not seen as losing one's accent, but as simply essential for being understood. People referred to speaking differently at different times, for example when at "home" or talking to relatives, when talking to English people on the telephone or when at work. In this, my informants' attitudes to accent were similar to the Northern Irish approach to ethnicity, demonstrating situational variability. Sometimes these were not conscious strategies. Some informants were vague about their accents and suggested while they might change over time, they were not bothered about this, or else said that the fact that their accent had remained or changed was equally by chance.

Strategies were affected by other choices, as if my informants mixed largely with English people, they were more likely to lose some of their accents than if they mixed largely with other Irish people. For example, Paul said that he tried to slow down his accent at work as people simply could not understand him, but living with other Irish people meant that these changes disappeared each evening as he went home.

Ironically, before he started work, it was his Irish friends who tried to encourage him to change the way he talked so he could be understood by future colleagues. Attitudes also changed over time. David said he made a conscious effort to keep his accent initially and then changed; others said they made a conscious effort to change and then abandoned the effort as stressful and going against their sense of self.

Sometimes, however, more fixed views about whether one should retain or lose one's Irish accent were proffered. Some insisted that they definitely planned to hold on to their accent; others talked of a "very deliberate decision" to speak more clearly. Mary was one informant who talked of the importance of adapting: "you sort of, you adapt into the lingo", she told me, adding that she felt she,

"didn't really have much choice... because.. a certain part of me wanted to be accepted as well".

Set against this, Caroline said,

"I don't know how to change my accent. I'd find that very difficult. It's just there really; I can't do anything about it... I mean, I suppose I could decide, well, I want to speak like such and such, but I would feel such a fraud".

Interestingly, listening to both these women speak, I found that both their accents sounded, in equal degree, Irish.

This leads us to an important point, which is the subjectivity of assessing what made a strong Irish accent. Mistakes were sometimes made: I have been mistaken for American, Scottish and South African; I have also been told I have a strong Irish accent; and when I visit "home", I am told that I sound

English. My informants too found that people often reacted differently to their accents. The fact that what is perceived as an Irish accent in England is often regarded as an English accent in Ireland was a source of irritation for many informants, who did not wish to be told they sounded English, with its accompanying implication of snobbery.

My own perception was that most of my informants sounded clearly Irish. The only exceptions were three of the O'Connell sisters, who had significantly anglicized their ways of speaking. Thelma, however, as I have noted, dropped this when she was with her family; when she was joking, particularly, her accent reasserted itself fully.

Another source of irritation for some of those informants who considered themselves British, was that their accents were used to label them as Irish. Interestingly, despite wishing to be known as "British", they did not choose to lose their accents and sound English. This again illustrates the desire to retain their own identities and self-definitions and have this accepted by English people.

Feelings about accent seemed to vary from being proud or glad to sound Irish, to considering it a "refinement" to sound as English as possible. Only the O'Connell sisters fitted into the latter category, however. Strong feelings existed about alternative strategies to one's own: people were despised for losing their accents in a week, and equally, for persisting in sounding parochial. Attachment to one's own accent, incidentally, did not indicate approval of all Irish accents, as some found male, Northern Irish accents harsh and

unpalatable.

Perhaps the essential factor was how much changing the way one spoke was seen as bound up with one's own integrity: if to change was seen as changing something fundamental about oneself, this was seen as something to be avoided. If it was seen as an essential, non-damaging strategy for survival, not affecting one's basic integrity, this was readily adopted.

This is reminiscent of Yalçın-Heckmann's (1995) material on Turkish Muslims in Germany. Investigating the extent of syncretism which was tolerated, she concluded that syncretism in culture was welcomed within the Turkish community, but in religion, this was seen as undesirable to other Turks. However, if religious syncretism were re-categorised as cultural, it became acceptable. The question of presentation and interpretation is thus vital in defining the acceptability of compromise for migrants. Returning to my informants, some chose to make changes to their accent which they were able to present to themselves and others as demonstrating flexibility and a capacity for integration, but not involving the denying or downgrading of their ethnic heritage.

On the whole, thus, I found that people were prepared to adapt their accents a little in order to ease difficulty and be understood, but did not want to eradicate them. While prepared to present a range of ethnic choices and ways of speaking, my informants did want to hold on to some ethnic designation which related to their origin in Ireland, and they did, on the whole, want their speech to reflect this origin.

Accent could thus still be preserved among those who favoured integration, as integration tended to be favoured only insofar as it permitted a continuing sense of distinctive Irishness.

To sum up, my conclusion is thus that my informants chose to reduce their commitment to their ethnic inheritance, in favour of a level of integration and adaptation to British culture: this represented both a pragmatic assessment of how it was easiest to live in British society, and also an emotional limiting of unconditional loyalty to Irishness.

It was done on a number of levels: integration could be a matter of doing the 'right' thing, but could also involve adjusting to the norms of behaviour in English society, and extend to adjusting to its core values. It could entail my informants calling themselves "British Irish", or adopting British values, or mixing with British friends. For Protestants who previously called themselves "British", this re-evaluation could, on the other hand, involve de-emphasizing British in favour of "Irish" or "Northern Irish" as an ethnic label. Both, paradoxically, represent the absorbing of information from their new situation and the production of a more encompassing sense of their ethnicity.

This process entailed a mixture of gentle adaptation and conflict for my informants. It was also fluid, a matter of ongoing evaluation, of movement to and from different positions. This could be a consistent progression or a sharp change in attitude after a period of time. My informants' aspirations to openly absorb some degree of their new

experience were, however, accompanied by a clear desire to remember something of their ethnic identity. While for all, some kind of re-evaluation took place, whereby their sense of ethnicity changed, within this, their ethnicity was also re-affirmed and, in a sense, claimed as their own, in a way that made sense to them. I shall now look in more detail at the nature of this identity.

#### **CONTENT, RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE**

Schildkrout suggests that the "culturally accepted principle of differentiation" per se is more important than the content of ethnicity. My informants had much to say about what Irishness represented or 'meant', and much that was contradictory. They were in agreement that the question of "Irish identity" was a relevant one to their lives, although they disagreed in their sense of how it mattered and what form it took. In this respect, it is true that what they most agreed upon was the principle that there was something distinct about Irishness and Irish people. This can therefore be separated out as of fundamental importance in itself, adding, as it does, to the objective standing of ethnicity. However, discussions with my informants on the content of Irishness were fascinating and rich, and therefore, unlike Schildkrout, I consider the content also to be of central importance, even though it can not be summed up in any single or simple way.

Concerning this content, I have detailed a number of areas in Chapter 7 which my informants raised as important, and which together, I suggest, constitute an overall picture of what



Irishness meant to them. While these are more detailed than T.S. Eliot's list of what he considered to define English culture,<sup>1</sup> I do not wish to replicate Ó Connor (1993) in asserting that the topics I have covered in any way comprehensively delineate what it is to be Irish (in her case, what it is to be a Catholic living in Northern Ireland). (Kells 1994) I would stress, instead, that they were key areas for my informants. It would be ambitious indeed to aim to cover everything that a subject like ethnicity could mean even to my small numbers of informants, and I do not wish to suggest that I have said everything there is to say about these topics, even for them.

The next question I wish to address is whether the individual, constituent elements I describe are in fact constituent elements of anything larger. Why not simply describe them in their own right? I could, for example, say that family and religion are important to my informants, without insisting that they tie in with any over-reaching sense of ethnicity. "Ethnicity" in this sense, would not be relevant to my informants, but merely an analytic construction.

This is a challenging question. In one sense, it seems to me that if one wishes to be reductionist and to dissect these elements in their own right, this is a valid approach, as they do have value and meaning in themselves. However, I suggest that this would not in fact cover the whole meaning. While

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<sup>1</sup> Namely, "Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the Twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, 19th Century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar". Abrams, F.; 23/7/95.

the idea of "ethnicity" itself is an analytic construction, it has been constructed to describe something which is experienced as having a reality.

Thus, it is my conclusion that these elements, by which I mean the constituent "content" elements of ethnicity, are connected, and that they form a network of meaning, both within and between individual Irish people. What is my evidence for this? Quite simply, the fact that my informants themselves said so: they spoke of these topics explicitly in relation to the question of ethnicity.

It is not enough to take this at face value, however. How did they speak of this? Sometimes it was spontaneously, without my prompting, when they offered information on what they thought being Irish was about, and explicitly related it to these topics. This might arise out of meeting in an Irish setting, or for no apparent reason. Among my core informants, spontaneous raising of such issues was more usual, as I did not feel the need to direct conversation, knowing I would have later opportunities to do so, if necessary. On other occasions, responses came to my direct questions about what being Irish meant. It is true that informants did, on occasion, suggest that I was making them think about questions they had not addressed before. This is worth considering.

Such a response could be seen as: (1) indicating the undesirable influence and emphasis which a researcher brings to a topic. As I indicate earlier, I believe that the researcher inevitably affects the informant's responses and

this is not so much a failing, as an important part of the data, worth making explicit. It could also be seen as: (2) demonstrating that the issues discussed have no relevance to the informants outside of the research situation. While I think that in some cases the issue of ethnic identity inevitably bore a heightened importance through its being talked about intensively with me, I do not think that in all other situations it was either dormant or meaningless, or indeed reduced to constituent parts. I base this partly on the passion and articulacy with which my informants discussed "being Irish" - both as a general subject, and in terms of what it consisted of - and partly on the fact that I was by no means always the one to raise the issue.

This leads us to the question of whether this ethnic identity was important to my informants, or just something they answered my questions about. This was quite difficult to assess and required attention to both spoken views and other actions. Furthermore, the question of importance operates on both interest and affective levels. Ethnicity can be important in a strategic sense, to gain whatever advantage may accrue to it, for example, financial benefit, advice and information from Irish agencies. It can also be important in terms of emotional value.

In terms of strategic value, my informants did not, in the main, avail of Irish organisations and the funding attached to them (although a few did work for these organisations); however, those from Northern Ireland did, as I have shown, manipulate their ethnic identity in terms of interest, usually

reaping social benefits from this. This manipulation did have limits, however, in that they did not tend to take it as far as to deny all sense of ethnic identity (remembering that "British" for Northern Irish Protestants is also an ethnic designation).

On the emotional front, quite opposing views were presented. Sometimes the felt value of ethnicity was asserted with clarity and conviction. Some informants talked in terms of a national psyche: that somehow one inherited the experiences of one's country, which then affected one's own attitudes; others, more immediately, considered that one's own religious upbringing and place of origin (whether North/Republic, country/town, Derry/Belfast, and so on) inevitably affected personal viewpoint. This contrasted with those informants who played down any importance ethnicity might have to them, regarding it as either secondary to other concerns, or simply of minimal relevance to their lives.

It is worth remembering that a passionate embracing or denying of Irishness both indicate an emotional reaction to it which in fact suggests the power it has in my informants' minds. Even negative emotions indicate attachment; to deny the importance of ethnicity can thus, paradoxically, draw attention to its centrality and no informants treated the subject with coolness or demonstrated indifference. In the early stages of my research, when I was looking at a wider group of Irish people, one second generation man presented me with exactly this kind of indifference, saying Irishness was "OK", but he was not really bothered, he just liked to go to

work and pay his bills. He stands out as strikingly different from my other informants, the sole example of indifference; his second generation status may well have been central to this.

My informants also expressed ambivalent feelings. Elizabeth, for example, alternated feelings of pride and shame in her Northern Irish heritage, depending on which aspects of it she was identifying - beautiful countryside versus terrorism, for example. Informants from the Republic who saw ethnicity as a fact were not free from ambivalence either. Breda, for example, complained about her colleagues being "so Irish!" but was also offended by being called "pro-British" on one occasion. She identified with Irishness, but also saw it as a negative thing.

This ambivalence could cause problems for my informants. One of the difficulties was that the political history of Ireland and England provided a legacy of opposition where one was pressured to be Irish or English. This, as we have seen, could cause tension and contradictions when one did not identify in a wholly positive and unproblematic way with either. For example, at a London Irish women's conference, one woman reported on the difficulty of defending Irishness in what was seen as a hostile environment, when one's own feelings were ambivalent about it. This level of ambivalence was more consciously expressed than that where behaviour belied words, but both levels were of great importance.

I shall now consider two examples. Caroline was one of those

informants who felt her ethnic identity was something which permeated not only her conscious, but also her unconscious mind; however, Alison's view was that "Irish" was only "something you put down on a form". This recalls Jenkins' (1997:63) suggestion that ethnicity can vary from having an importance at the level of primary socialisation, to, at the other end of the scale, merely indicating an official classification. It is helpful to step back at this point and consider these women's views in the context of why these have been presented to me and what this might mean for each of them.

Caroline, firstly, turned to her ethnicity to explain her difficulties in social interaction, suggesting that the reason for friction at her workplace could relate to her colleagues' difficulties with her Irishness, although she also suggested gender as a possible explanation. By focusing on her unconscious, she also found an explanation for discovering "knee-jerk" reactions or opinions in herself which she found hard to justify or understand. Lastly, it harmonised with her experience of psychotherapy. Such a view of her ethnicity thus assisted in her way of understanding herself and those experiences which perplexed her, and in presenting this to me she was also working through her sense of identity for herself.

Alison, by contrast, had reason to play down diversity, being a Catholic married to a Protestant from Northern Ireland. Again, we see intelligent, goal-oriented assessment. However, individual personality also plays a role: Alison was not given

to introspective, analytic thought with Caroline's readiness, and being more comfortable with surface interaction, it is therefore consistent that her ethnic identity was also presented more on this level.

It is useful to consider how these women's stated views accord with their behaviour. I will focus here on Alison. Alison in fact surrounded herself with Irish people - her partner and friends were Irish and she socialised in Irish areas; she kept in close contact with family and friends in Ireland, where she eventually returned and she also stated that she felt that the Irish were very different from the English. Her casual presentation therefore becomes worth examining in more detail.

I feel that Alison's mixed-marriage status and her connection with me prior to fieldwork were central in these contradictions. I had grown up with her Protestant husband and I suspect she identified me with sectarian relations in Northern Ireland: I was from the Protestant camp who, in her experience, had opposed Paul's marriage to her, a Catholic; furthermore, I had connections in her home town and could potentially have fed damaging information back and for these reasons, I suspect, she felt a restraint in what she expressed to me, despite my reassurances. What is presented to me can thus be seen to vary according to the depth of contact I had with the informant and the extent to which s/he felt safe to discuss the matter. The specifics of each situation can thus help illuminate the reasons for variation and contradictions.

However, such contradiction between non-verbal behaviour and words was not, as I have indicated before, confined to Alison. One of my most consistent findings was that people's words contradicted their other behaviours. While there were some informants who talked and acted in a way which consistently emphasized the importance of Irishness, and one who clearly seemed consistently uninterested, these were definitely in the minority. In fact, two-thirds of those for whom I have clear information, behaved in a way which was inconsistent with their spoken views. That is, they stressed how important their ethnicity was, but did not do anything to affirm it by attending Irish venues, mixing with Irish people and so on; or else, their social life revolved around Irish contacts and yet they stressed that their ethnicity was of minimal relevance to them. I shall now look in some detail at how we can understand the contradictions between words and other behaviours which were shown by my informants, recalling Eriksen's (1993:17) reflection that

"it is.. frequently contradictions.. that lead to anthropological insights".

#### **CONTRADICTIONS**

I shall begin by considering the distinction between words and other behaviours. While words may be understood as a kind of behaviour, they differ in significant ways from non-verbal actions. Words represent, in most cases, the articulate product of conscious thought: they are chosen consciously. Non-verbal actions, on the other hand, can be quite unconscious. Of course, some actions are self-consciously chosen, just as some words are not thought through, but



represent what Caroline described as a "knee-jerk reaction". The use of these knee-jerk words still relies, however, on the conscious use of the linguistic repertoire available to the speaker.

Hence, there is, I believe, a helpful distinction between the rational, conscious, considered positions which exist within the domain of language and the unconscious behaviour which occurs without one's thinking about or analyzing it. The latter is in the same realm as Bourdieu's notions of practical mastery and embodiedness. (Calhoun, LiPuma & Postone 1995) In Bourdieu's understanding, much knowledge is held in an unexamined way in the body and in one's automatic or unexamined behaviours.

I suggest that there are a number of ways of understanding the contradictions between words and other behaviours. The ways I will list provide a clearer understanding of the reasons behind the contradictions, which in turn help us to better understand the way in which ethnicity is meaningful. This includes an understanding of its limitations and the way in which it can be manipulated. However, none of these explanations lead us to dismiss ethnicity as irrelevant; rather, they help us to see the complexity with which it related to my informants' lives, and how it both directed behaviour and was itself manipulated.

Firstly, (1) choosing to emphasize ethnicity at some points or in some ways and not in others may, as we have seen, relate to a pragmatic assessment of what is most helpful to an individual in a particular situation. This represents the

making of intelligent, rational, goal-oriented choices. When my informants did this, they were assessing their ethnic committedness in terms of interest, and demonstrating the power of choice which they retained over it. However, this concerned only their self-presentation and was separate from how they felt.

(2) In the realm of feelings about ethnicity, however, ambivalence may also exist, leading to contradictory behaviour and words. If my informants felt entirely positive about their ethnicity, they would have been less likely to become migrants, given that their motivation for migration was not primarily economic. In other words, dissatisfaction with being immersed in Irish society helped prompt migration in the first place for them. This is not to say a dislike of certain aspects of Irish culture is essential to impel migration, as a sense of curiosity may itself be sufficient motivation. However, most of my informants did have negative feelings about certain aspects of their Irish heritage.

(3) It is worth stressing the "normality" of ambivalent and contradictory responses. Wallman, (1984:63) for example, suggests that inconsistency is a normal feature of boundary processes. Just as the "Irish community" is heterogeneous, so my informants' responses to it and to their ethnic background were not homogenous. They did not favour an all or nothing approach, with Irishness all good, or all bad. Instead, their feelings were mediated by a sense of what was valuable about Irishness (this could be sharpened by experiencing certain, unforeseen "lacks" in English society which drew attention to

virtues of Irish ways) together with what was disliked (which may have prompted migration in the first place). This situation was not one in which my informants powerfully chose one position over another, as in the first point, but where they fluctuated in how much they wanted a particular choice.

It is worth remembering that ambivalent feelings are common in the human experience; a 100% experience of zeal for a cause or issue leads to what is perceived as fanaticism, which tends to be regarded negatively. So, having ambivalent feelings is not a sign that Irishness is unimportant or un compelling.

A fourth explanation (4) develops this idea of the "normality" of ambivalence by reminding us of Holy & Stuchlik's analysis. They suggest that understanding reality in terms of ideal representations, situation-specific behavioural norms, and actions, helps us to understand apparent contradictions as in fact revealing information about different realms. Thus, informants may identify with their ethnic heritage more in one realm than in another. Those who identified their ideal partner as Irish, for example, might not in terms of action ever favour ethnic heritage. Others who actually chose an Irish partner might not regard it as the ideal. Once again, those who would favour Irishness completely, in all realms, would be returning to a situation which would popularly be defined as fanatical. My informants were very scathing of those Irish people who chose to favour Irishness in a way which prevented any level of integration.

The topic of integration leads to a consideration of: (5) the

actions of other, English and Irish people, which could affect my informants. Negative English reactions relating to the experience of anti-Irish feeling in Britain and the political history of conflict between Ireland and Britain, could affect the full and unequivocal identification with Irish identity which might otherwise occur. As an example, some informants talked of subduing their Irishness initially, due to a sense of it being unvalued by those around them, but of embracing it later and of recognising its importance. This development would relate ethnic identification to (increasing) self-confidence, but also shows that embracing one's ethnicity in Britain is problematic. It is worth noting that the behaviour of other Irish people, whom my informants considered an embarrassment, could also affect this identification.

A last possibility (6) is that a sense of guilt may hamper the individual who has left Ireland for individualistic reasons. This may lead to an emphasis on ethnic heritage even where one does not actually wish to act on it. One may feel guilty at not identifying wholly, or wholly positively with one's ethnic heritage and thus over-play it in order to compensate. This results in a manipulation of ethnicity, in this case, predominantly to silence uncomfortable inner feelings, but also involving the favourable presentation of oneself to a public, as in point one.

This raises the issue of the power of ethnicity and where it resides, whether with the individual or in the collective idea of ethnicity. In a dialectical situation, the power can move from seeming to be fully with the choosing individual, towards

residing fully in the idea of ethnicity. It is worth remembering that "ethnicity" is, after all, a construction of individuals, and as such can only have as much power as it is collectively given. However, this power, once given, exists beyond the remit of a single individual, and as such, can have a constraining effect. In this particular example, the individual is somewhere in the middle, restricted by collective ideas of ethnicity, but also manipulating them to suit him/herself.

With so many possible ways of understanding contradictions and ambivalences, I do not think these can be explained as representing the falsity of claims to an interest in ethnic heritage. The narrative my informants created was one in which Irish heritage featured heavily. This could be because they said it was important. There will be, potentially, all sorts of reasons for this, as I have shown, but these reasons do not explain away the fact that many informants talked their Irishness into being. It could be because their other behaviour demonstrated an important connection with Irishness. In a few cases, it was both. For no-one was ethnicity a matter of indifference.

I would now like to develop another important way of understanding the contradictions and confusions my informants demonstrated, which supports my sense of the underlying importance of ethnicity. This is through introducing the notion of the "unconscious". To avoid reification, it is perhaps better to call this 'the part of the mind which is unconscious'. I do not wish to imply Freudian ideas of the

unconscious being the source of all that is repressed, but to understand it in a way which is less prescribed and, in a sense, more literal - it is simply an area below or beyond conscious recognition. This is closer to a Jungian psychoanalytic understanding.

In other words, I am asserting that the mind is not limited to that part of it which is conscious and understood. This is a concept which my informants forwarded to me as well as one which makes sense of my own experience as a migrant. It is also forwarded by Bourdieu, who suggests that,

"since informants are the products of particular histories which endure in the habitus, their outcome can never be analyzed adequately as the outcome of conscious calculation". (1991:17)

My proposal, thus, is that ideas about Irishness can remain dormant, unconscious, but nevertheless exist and influence the individual. I suggest, correspondingly, that a helpful way to conceptualise "Irishness" is as a repository of meaning, in fact, of many and diverse meanings, some inter-related, some opposing each other; my informants selected those meanings which made most sense to them, holding them up to view as representing their connection with their ethnic identity. This repository or reservoir can also be compared to the unconscious mind, in that much of what Irishness is taken to mean, has been learned and absorbed by my informants during their childhood in Ireland. It is in such early phases of life that important information becomes laid down unconsciously; this is, additionally, a time which my informants emphasized as being at the root of their ethnic identity.

It is accepted in psychoanalytic theory that ideas and beliefs which are unconsciously held can be extremely important and influential. The less they are examined, the more power they have to shape the behaviour of the individual. In an almost magical scenario, to name, that is, to see and understand particular aspects of the unconscious, is to control them, to limit their power. Thus, it is not appropriate to say that if ideas about ethnicity reside in the unconscious mind, and are rarely talked about, then they are meaningless or unimportant.

However, it does beg the obvious, sceptical question of whether the ideas are really there. After all, how can we know, if we are truly unconscious of them? I have suggested that deeply held notions of Irishness did exist for my informants for a number of reasons. I will reiterate two, relating them explicitly to this notion of the unconscious.

The first is, that they moved into the conscious mind when discussions about being Irish arose, for example with me. The research scenario is not the only one to provoke thought about Irishness, contrary to the statement on page 300. Being in England itself makes the question of ethnicity a much more self-conscious one than it was in Ireland, as one is constantly brought up against difference. It may be an English person drawing attention to differences in upbringing by asking what it's "really like" living with "the Troubles", or noticing my informants' accents; it may be a recognition that English ways of behaving or attitudes are different.

There are many potential triggers.

Ideas about Irishness thus move in and out of consciousness at different times and to a different extent for different informants, as they are summoned to make sense of living in Britain. This can relate to personality. Some people are more inclined towards making implicit practises explicit, as Strathern has indicated, and enjoy analyzing what they believe and think. Others prefer to do more than to think. Again, for some people, their interest in their ethnic identity, and in analyzing their position in London in relation to this, is more developed than for others, who stress perhaps their gender, or sexuality, or career plan more. It is important to acknowledge variety. However, it is also important to recognise that all my informants carried a supply of ideas about Irishness which they were able to make readily explicit to me.

The second reason for judging ideas about ethnicity to be compelling is through looking at my informants' actions. The contradictions expressed between my informants' words and other behaviours can be seen to support the idea that when Irishness remains to a greater degree unexamined in the unconscious, it produces a greater controlling effect over actions, than where it is named and understood in the conscious mind. Those informants who denied its importance to me, yet acted in a way which emphasized their Irishness, without recognising the contradictions, were thus unable to see the effect of their ethnicity on their lives; this contrasted with those who were more conscious of their



ethnicity, and thus freer to choose whether to act on it.

This returns us to the question of control over ethnicity, and to the primordial versus circumstantial schools alluded to in Chapter 1. Did my informants control and choose their ethnicity, or did it control them? My suggestion is that those informants who talked more openly about their ethnicity, and did less about it, were more in control. They had seen and recognised its importance, which had, paradoxically, reduced its control over them. They became free to choose how much to act on it. Those who denied its importance, but surrounded themselves with Irish people and venues, were demonstrating the extent to which the ethnic heritage which they carried in their unconscious mind, controlled them. Unaware of its power, they continued to be shaped by it.

My informants themselves also indicated a conscious concern with control by wishing to choose the extent to which they could identify with Irishness. They wished to choose the friends they wanted, to be Irish and British, or Irish and integrated. As an example, the one informant whom I witnessed denying being Irish in my presence (Thelma), did so because a stranger approached her, identifying her as Irish. Afterwards, she expressed her loathing of people's assumptions that Irishness indicated approachability. So, she wished to be in control of when people perceived her as Irish and how they responded to this. Given the difficulties of controlling others' responses, this desire for control among my informants

was very likely to lead to frustration, but also to a choice of varying tactics in order to effect it. This accounts for some of the variance in responses which I encountered.

#### **MEANING OF ETHNICITY**

We have now reached a point at which it is appropriate to re-examine what, at a deeper level, ethnicity meant to my informants. I have established that it mattered to them and influenced their beliefs and actions. Why was this and what was it really all about? I am here answering this question primarily for my informants, although my answers may have implications for ethnicity in general.

Perhaps ethnicity is really "about" culture: sharing a culture is what makes ethnicity important. Brown (1970:214) suggests that the fundamental force which impels each ethnic group is that of its culture: "what meaning would their lives have were they to forfeit this?" he enquires. This is not, however, Schildkrout's (1974:187) view. She, instead, emphasizes "the irrelevance of culture" in examining the persistence of ethnicity.

Baumann (1992) also challenges the representation of ethnic categories as communities with their own reified culture. He suggests that representing ethnic groups as communities which somehow own culture, is part of a dominant discourse about community which is at variance with the "demotic" discourse, that is, that of the communities themselves. Here, culture is presented as a process, something which is worked on together, rather than being an automatic possession resulting from one's inclusion in an ethnic group. He also stresses the separation

between culture and community in his analysis of Irish culture in Southall, suggesting that Irish culture was recognised here as a heritage even though an Irish "community" did not exist.

I would incline to a middle view between Brown and Schildkrout. "Culture" is considered important to my informants as part of being Irish, but it is not the only issue. Other aspects include ideas of shared character, difference from "the English", importance of family and so on. I would agree with Baumann that culture is a process of meaning-creation, but add that inclusion in the ethnic group is a necessary beginning to being able to contribute to this process and in this sense, ownership of culture does follow from membership of the group. Belonging to an Irish community was important to many of my informants who were not taking part in it in an active way: they still believed in its existence and considered themselves to be part of it. In this sense, it existed for them regardless of whether it was acted out.

Cohen (1978:388) emphasizes multiple identities. He suggests that ethnicity is "first and foremost situational" and that the same person can be categorised according to different criteria in different situations (in one situation, occupation, another, education, another ethnicity). This is clearly true: different criteria become relevant in different circumstances, and ethnicity is not necessarily primary. As I have found, ethnicity itself was situational for my Northern Irish informants, in that what it meant when it was emphasized

was also variable.

Cohen also suggests that ethnic labels are applied in order to explain behaviour. They provide a set of features which indicate what to expect, where such behaviour comes from and how to react to it; indeed, in his view, ethnicity has no existence outside this relation with others, and is, centrally, a "cultural process of boundary maintenance and reconstruction". (Ibid:397) Following this, ethnic labels are just one way in which we try to understand the world and limit the uncertainty and strangeness of it. They serve the function of helping one to know how to understand others' behaviour, breaking down the unknownness of the stranger by possessing a set of expectations which can be applied before s/he even acts, and establishing boundaries around one's own and others' groups.

This does not, of course, account for the importance of the label for the person within the ethnic group, as it emphasizes the need for guidance in dealing with the ethnic stranger. However, Cohen (ibid:401) does address this. As the ethnic group offers universally available membership roles, ego is universally socialised to feel that ethnic membership is part of herself. It relates her to others, defines her identity and gives her a sense of shared fate as a person with "her people". Ethnicity thus becomes the antidote to alienation in modern society, and provides a kind of map for people to react to others and to understand their own location in the world.

For my informants, who were first generation, ethnicity was

first and foremost about birthplace, or rather, birth and growing-up place. One's earliest experiences are, I have suggested, the most formative in laying down one's identity: even though they may be re-evaluated substantially in later life, they form the base from which one starts. Place of origin informed my informants (of who they were), and formed them, and whoever they wanted to become in later life, this early formation was felt to be of inescapable and fundamental importance. Place of origin was, furthermore, felt by my informants to lead to a particular character of person. This related to the way of life attaching to that place and to the cultural values and practices ensuing from it; these also provided a specific cultural history and heritage.

This birth and growing-up place also refers to a family context, as my informants were brought up within families in Ireland. The family is one's first community, where one learns first about the world. The beliefs and practices of the place of origin are, thus, filtered through the family, which is the individual's main source of information at the beginning of his life and continues to be an important channel even into adulthood. Family offers both a blood connection to Irishness and a locatedness in the physical island of Ireland, both of which were seen as fundamental to my informants.

Despite talking fully, in personal terms about their families, my informants did not, however, explicitly link kinship to their ethnicity. This is, I suggest, because it was simply too obvious to mention. All had Irish parents. Although a

few had one non-Irish parent, this was not considered to diminish in any way a claim to Irish ethnicity: one parent and blood-link to Irishness, together with an experience of being born and brought up in Ireland oneself, comprised indisputable Irish credentials as far as they were concerned.

I suggest that ethnicity was not experienced as a choice for my informants, although how they reacted to it and what they stressed as important certainly was. Having grown in an Irish context, while they might agree with Hartley that,

"the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there", (1973:7)

their belief was that this past had contributed in a fundamental way to who they were and who they could be, and the frequent reactions of others to them as different, due to their accents and origins, reinforced this belief, as did their own continued connections with their families, who remained, powerfully, in this place of origin. Their ethnicity thus helped them understand, as Cohen suggests, their own behaviour as well as that of others.

To sum up, ethnicity is something which my informants were educated into at an early age in Ireland. Coming to England helped make explicit some of this learning, and new meanings were attached to old ideas and symbols. In many cases, my informants chose to emphasize, but also to limit, the importance of ethnicity. In other cases, ethnicity, remaining unexamined, retained a deeper, compelling power, which affected actions and choices.

There was much individual variety, however, as informants chose either to talk of or to enact different aspects of their

Irish heritage. The unconscious power of ethnicity is not, after all, something which necessarily obliterates choice. The choices available were not endless, as there was a collective consensus on what could be included in the ideas of Irishness and what could not. Inevitably, this was not agreed clearly; rather, conflict could occur about the inclusion of different aspects, especially on religious grounds. The overall consensus remained, however, in the sense that some items were clearly in, some clearly out, and others in dispute according to background and attitudes.

In choosing which aspects of ethnicity to emphasize, my informants indicated their personal preferences and interests, and something of their backgrounds and experiences. However, the affective bond, which was a vital part of the picture, complemented the notion of choice. This reminds us that ethnicity cannot be explained fully in utilitarian terms. An emotional bond remains, the source of which may be as simple as relating to the centrality of early and formative experiences in Ireland.

It is important to emphasize variety in this also. A vast range of emotional reactions was available, from nostalgia to disdain, but in all cases, the emotional need to embrace or deny was evident: both indicated the continuing resonance of the ethnic heritage, as denial was, for my informants, too passionate to allow it to be taken literally, and, in any case, contradicted by behaviour through which my informants embraced Irish links. Choice was also, of course, limited by structural constraints and the opinions of others.

So, Irishness was both chosen, strategically and rationally, and on a deeper level, compelling, both for affective or emotional reasons, and due to its location in the unconscious part of the mind. It was also imposed on my informants by others whose views they could not control. In the complications surrounding this, a narrative was woven either in words or other actions, of what it meant to be Irish. Inevitably, this narrative produced complexities and contradictions, but rather than indicating a subject which was considered irrelevant, they were the contradictions of a rich and resonant heritage.

I will now look in more detail at two particular aspects of this heritage, religion and politics; these topics will comprise Chapters 9 and 10.



## CHAPTER 9

### RELIGION

In Chapter 3, we saw that religious practice and belief were much greater in the North and in the Republic of Ireland than in Great Britain. In this chapter, I will consider what place religious practice and ideology had in the lives of my informants in London. I distinguish between religion as personal faith, as cultural influence and as ethnic identity.

I will begin by offering a number of reasons why it is valuable to focus on religion, and then outline my informants' views. I will suggest that religion remained important to my informants at a level of personal faith, but that this was re-evaluated in London, its meaning tailored to the individual, rather than to the needs of the faith community. I will employ the term "spirituality" to distinguish between this individual faith and a religious practice which was more closely connected to church structures.

Next, I shall consider the contrasting role of religion in Britain and Ireland. Regular church attendance was an expected cultural practice in Ireland and my informants found this constraining. However, as this was their association with religion, discussion of religion tended to involve discussion of the Church, Protestant and Catholic. My informants would orient themselves to this, even if only to express distance from it. In London, religion, although still culturally influential, played a very different role and I shall investigate this difference and how it was perceived.

I shall also consider what happened to the religious divisions of Ireland, post-migration.

Following this, I will consider the relation of religion to ethnic identity, suggesting that my informants saw religiosity as part of their ethnic identity. This was expressed differently for Protestants and Catholics, as I will show. My informants' perceptions related directly to their residence in London, which led them to contrast this aspect of their heritage with the secular practices now surrounding them. It did not mean that they embraced the religious component of their ethnic identity whole-heartedly, as the cultural influence of religion in Ireland was mostly regarded negatively. Instead, they re-moulded it in a way which rendered it more acceptable to them. I will present four case studies towards the end of the chapter to illustrate the variety of ways in which this happened and then draw my conclusions.

I have chosen to devote a chapter to religion alone for a number of reasons. Firstly, my informants spoke often of religion: it exercised them both in response to my questions and independently of them. The importance of religion in Ireland, which I have documented, renders this emphasis unsurprising. Religion was central to my informants' upbringing. Their formative experiences involved inculcation in religious beliefs, and I have shown in the previous chapter just how central such early experiences are.

Connected with this, religion is centrally related to ethnic identity in Ireland; this is most clearly expressed in the

North, with its continuing violent conflict between Catholics and Protestants on the subject of the legitimacy of Irish or British national identities; it is also evident in the Republic's historic attachment to a Catholic identity, where Catholicism and nationalism have been closely interwoven. Religious affiliation is thus a fundamental building block of Irish ethnicity and it is consequently worth examining separately.

Next, in moving to Britain, my informants have chosen a host country which is strikingly more secular than their country of origin and I was interested in what choices they made regarding religion in this context. By leaving Ireland, they were freed to choose which aspects of their family and cultural values they wished to retain, and which to reject. As part of this process, they could decide whether religious observance was of true value to them, or something which they could turn from with relief. It could become a choice rather than an obligation. Their choices in this area therefore illustrated, more broadly, how they responded to the elements of their ethnic heritage when at a distance from Ireland.

More generally, spirituality is a significant part of human identity, whatever one chooses to do with this. In my aim to present a reasonably whole picture of my informants' identities, it is thus important to consider what is done with this aspect of identity. In doing so, I bring together strands which have appeared throughout the thesis, as well as new observations.

I shall now look at my informants' responses to religion; as these were almost invariably expressed in relation to the Church, I shall consider specifically their attitudes to the Church.

#### **THE CHURCH: CULTURAL, SPIRITUAL, PERSONAL**

My informants expressed considerable ambivalence to the Church. Their memories of the Church in Ireland contained much that was negative, and views were often voiced with emotion, and indeed anger.

The Church's dogmatism was derided. One woman stated,

"they're just ignoring human relations and what it is that goes on between people, you know, what's the most humane thing to do for the sake of.. tradition or sticking to certain kinds of principles".

It was also criticised for monopolising spirituality and denying alternative routes to God, and for promoting bigotry and nationalism. In general, it could be seen as repressive, insular and claustrophobic and one person announced airily that religions only caused war and were a bad thing.

The Church was also seen as repressive towards sexuality. The Catholic Church's enmity to contraception and its forbidding of divorce, were seen as curtailing people's rights to choose for themselves and as interference in personal relationships. Some lesbian women had particularly hostile feelings about the Church, as heterosexuality is at least affirmed within marriage, whereas lesbian sexuality is regarded as sinful by most Christian churches and particularly the Catholic Church.

The expectations of church attendance in Ireland were also problematic for my informants. They complained of having

religious observance forced on them while they were growing up and of the store of resentment they subsequently built up about this.

Some negative feelings were less general and more specific to people's individual experience. For example, Martin's hostility to the Church stemmed from its treatment of his brother, a priest.

However, my informants also expressed some positive views about the Church. These tended to relate to its value in helping them establish themselves in London. This could involve practical benefits; for example, it could be used as a way of finding a place to live and people to live with, either through an organised notice-board system, whereby parishioners could advertise flats, or through appeal to the local knowledge and contacts of the priest or vicar. It also had an emotional value. This could be through providing a community of potential friends and the support of a minister/priest, which was important for some informants. The familiar ritual of the services was also valued by some informants, when everything else around them was experienced as unfamiliar.

The Church thus had a valuable role during this transitional period in my informants' lives. It was also a useful resource in other times of transition. Some informants spoke in general terms about the importance of religious ritual in marking stepping stones in life, and the value of bringing up one's children with religious beliefs.

Otherwise, positive statements about religion tended to be

focused on the role of personal faith for my informants, rather than on the Church. I return to this below.

Positive and negative statements were often combined by my informants. For example, Stephen experienced his schooling with the Christian Brothers in Ireland as so traumatic that it precipitated a "nervous breakdown"; however, he still wanted his daughter to attend a Catholic school, and lamented the fact that she could only do so in England, when Irish schools were better. Caroline spoke angrily of the dominance of the Catholic Church, of its intolerance, sexism and distance from real life issues, and the way it substituted empty rules for empathy and help, yet attended church on occasion. She also spoke of the value of the older, more traditional religious rituals (preferring the idea of the Mass in Latin) and the pleasure of the atmosphere which could accompany these. I shall now analyze my informants' views by religious denomination and by gender.

The more strongly negative feelings tended to be voiced by Catholic informants, Protestants tending less to criticism of their church. I suggest that this relates to the nature of the two faiths. Catholicism emphasizes the necessity of weekly attendance at Mass, whereas Protestantism is less preoccupied with this. Thus, less frequent attendance at church is a simple way out for ambivalent Protestants who still wish to claim that they practise their religion. However, for Catholics, to practise their faith, they are expected to make more consistent contact with the Church and are thus potentially confronted with all the things they

consider negative, each week.

Secondly, Catholicism emphasizes the institution of the Church as the bearer of authority, and tradition as a major source of guidance, whereas Protestantism emphasizes individual conscience. This does not necessarily mean that questioning the faith is tolerated within Protestant churches. Rather, I think the consequence in Ireland, particularly the North, is that there are numerous Protestant churches to choose from; one can change to one more in keeping with one's principles without rejecting Protestantism per se, whereas within Catholicism, there is only one Church and one way.

The options for dissenting Catholics are thus to: (i) reject Catholicism outright; (ii) reject it in part by calling oneself "lapsed Catholic"; (iii) remain within the Church while retaining strongly ambivalent feelings towards it; and/or (iv) look for another Catholic church with a more sympathetic priest. All of these options were grasped by different informants. Most, additionally, expressed ambivalence to me, although not all may have seen what they were doing in such terms.

It is interesting to consider the implications of expressing ambivalence on religious issues within Ireland. This, of course, has general implications, given the level of ambivalence I have reported for my informants in wider issues. In N. Ireland, ambivalence is not at all welcomed. Rather, clarity about which religious camp one belongs to is considered essential. In a situation where zero sum politics are played, any criticism of one's own side automatically

entails advantage for the other side and such behaviour is thus to be avoided. As part of the commitment to one's "own", there is thus an expectation that one will not let the side down by criticising one's own church. Furthermore, given the favouring of either/or scenarios, to be negative and positive together, to be critical and remain in the Church, would be problematic.

In the Republic, possibly as a reaction to a history of oppression of Catholicism, the Constitution illustrates Catholic values and the Church and State are closely interlinked. Criticism of the Catholic Church would initially have been treated as disloyalty to the newly formed Republic. Now, there is increasing toleration of criticism of the Church, but, as I indicated in Chapter 3, this is localised and somewhat embryonic. My informants, therefore, may find themselves with more space in which to be critical when out of Ireland, and able to express difficulties they may already have had with the churches, perhaps for the first time.

Women were particularly unhappy with what they saw as the patriarchal nature of the Church, whereas this tended not to bother male informants. Caroline quoted an Irish short story in which women were deemed an "occasion of sin", as illustrating the attitude of the Catholic Church. An "occasion of sin" as defined by the Catholic Church, is a context where sin is likely to take place - a place or situation which is best avoided as likely to lead to sin, although not in itself sinful. Issues of divorce and contraception, although mentioned by both genders, tended to be expressed more



vehemently by women and with more distance by men.

Women were also, however, more likely to translate positive feelings about religion into church attendance; they were, thus, more exercised by religion, in both a positive and a negative sense: its value and its demerits both tended to matter to them more than to my male informants.

One way to understand, and perhaps resolve the ambivalence I have been talking about, is through separating the overarching concept of "religion" into two aspects: the Church and what I will refer to as "spirituality", or to put this another way, between culturally sanctioned religious observance and personal faith. This kind of contrast was made by most of my informants who wished to dissociate themselves from aspects of the Church which they found distasteful, yet did not wish to reject the spiritual side of themselves or of life as they saw it. Although informants did not tend to use the word "spirituality", I have chosen this as the best way to sum up a religiosity which did not depend on the Church, which was the concept my informants struggled to find words to convey. Outside the vocabulary of the Church, faith is perhaps harder to express, which is one reason why hesitations and uncertainties characterised statements about personal faith. Spirituality is also a very personal matter. Martin, referring to his desire to be a monk, said he could talk about almost every other subject openly, but this felt too personal to discuss easily.

Focusing on spirituality was a way of salvaging something from what was seen as the wreckage of the Church, by rejecting the

Church itself, but retaining a personal faith through a sense of God, who lies at its centre. This is a peculiarly appropriate conceptualisation for my informants, enabling an individualistic shaping of the sacred together with a rejection of aspects of religious dogma which they found unacceptable. Ways of emphasizing spirituality included, most basically, emphasizing God and distinguishing God from the Church, and rejecting church attendance/support as being the only way to God. I shall now give a few examples.

Breda, a Catholic from the Republic, considered herself religious, but noted that her Irish colleagues would be shocked to hear this, as she was so against the Church. Having objected to the falsity of sending Christmas cards without belief in the religious significance of Christmas, and having announced that she did not consider herself either a Catholic, or a lapsed Catholic, regarding this as "holding on to the skirts of the Church", she had been dismissed by her colleagues as a "heathen", she said. However, she declared that she believed that God was love, and everything else secondary. She also believed in reincarnation, a non-Christian belief. Breda felt that the more one accepted all facets of oneself, including spirituality (and she was one of the few to use this actual word), the more harmonious and whole one was as a result.

Caroline, another Catholic from the Republic, announced,

"I don't really like organised religion any more", considering it too "male-dominated", too involved in "hierarchy and power", too inclined to dabble inappropriately

in politics and interfere in personal relationships.

"I think it's.. something that Irish people suffer, this organised religion",

she continued, contrasting this with the English whose avoidance of it she considered "healthy". However, she continued,

"I.. would have... religious beliefs, if you want to call them that",

outlining these as having "a great regard for life and humanity" and a belief in nature; she described herself jokingly as "paganistic".

Paul, a Protestant from Northern Ireland, said,

"I don't count going to church as a good advocate of believing in religion".

He and his wife, Alison, differentiated between "faith", or "genuine" reasons for interest in religion, and adherence to a religious category as a label, which they felt was the norm in Northern Ireland. As Alison was a Northern Irish Catholic, their marriage would have resulted in particular sensitivity to this issue. Alison suggested that Catholics in Northern Ireland attended church because "if they didn't go.. they'd be talked about", and out of a fear that if they failed to attend, "something's going to happen to them". She preferred being able to attend church in London when she chose to and wanted to go, rather than because of community pressure, or out of fear of the consequences of non-attendance, but stressed that she believed in God regardless of whether she went to church or not.

This expresses very clearly the way in which church attendance in Ireland was connected with cultural norms for my

informants, rather than seen as personal choice resulting from individual faith. My informants tended to criticise such church and community observance, but retained a desire for a personal faith, an independent spirituality; this could include church attendance or not, but according to choice rather than obligation.

The degree of spirituality varied between my informants, as did the degree to which church attendance was part of its expression. My informants began to attend church according to their desire rather than their duty, and for some this meant non-attendance. Eleanor spoke of her father's angry rejection of her when she even suggested not going to Mass at home and of how "I toe the line" as a result. In London, however, she was free not to attend and to describe herself as "not religious". Since coming to London she had been able to express her rejection of Catholicism, which, while present in Ireland, needed to be repressed.

While total rejection of religiosity was not the norm for my informants, certainly the automatic church attendance which was characteristic of life in Ireland was not continued in London by any. I shall now look at the differences between religion in Ireland and in Britain, specifically, London, beginning with a recap of my findings in Chapter 3 and a brief discussion of the situation in Britain. I will then move on to my informants' views.

#### **RELIGION IN IRELAND AND IN BRITAIN**

We have seen in Chapter 3 that religion in Ireland was a potent cultural influence, affecting individual behaviour,

social norms, public policy and legal practice. While laws are less influenced by religious norms in the North than in the Republic, the social consensus operates to reduce religious freedom. Furthermore, the dominance of "the Troubles" has militated against change, together with the ideology that religious freedom is already present in the North. In the Republic, the forces of modernisation and secularisation have brought about greater change, due to its comparative stability and resultant openness to challenge, a process which is, however, only beginning. While the modern Republic is in flux as regards this and other core values, the overall experience of religion in both parts of Ireland is that it provides a resonant community focus.

In Britain, by contrast, religion does not govern social norms and public policy to the same extent as in Ireland. The norm here is non-attendance at church and, generally, low religious observance. However, the cultural influence of Christianity remains significant, underlying social values, public policy and laws in a more under-stated way than in Ireland. The norms of Christianity thus remain influential as a system of ethics but these are not considered necessarily to relate to religion and the Christian churches.

Other world faiths are increasing in eminence in Britain, in contrast to the predominantly Christian population of Ireland, while the Protestant denominations are declining. Islam, for example, has as many followers as Methodism in modern Britain. (Methodist Church Minutes of Conference and Directory 1996; Derby University & Interfaith Network 1993; Central Board of

Finance of the Church of England 1997)

Wilson (1976:84) suggests that in discussing contemporary religious practice, we are witnessing two movements. One is secularisation and the decline of old faiths, and the other is sectarianism, or the rise of new cults. Phádraig, quoting Wilson, defines secularisation as:

"The process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance". (1986:145)

While secularisation can be said to have begun in the Republic, it is clearly in its infancy; in fact, what has begun is the debate about whether this is possible or desirable. In Britain, however, secularisation is clearly more advanced. Wilson suggests that as the established religious institutions lose social significance and become less credible, new religious cults appear offering,

"new therapies, new access to power, new modes of personal reassurance, and occasionally...something like a new social order". (1976:84-5)

In Britain, this process can partly be seen in what is known as the "New Age", a movement which subsumes a range of eclectic spiritual alternatives.

The decline of the Christian Church, the increase of other world faiths, such as Islam, and the growth of new sects and eclectic movements as an alternative to traditional religious structures, are thus characteristic features of Great Britain and in all of these respects, it differs greatly from Ireland.

My informants also felt that there were striking differences between religious attitudes and practice in Britain and Ireland and for some this was experienced as culture-shock.

In general, the lack of interest in religion, the Church and spirituality was emphasized by them as typical of English behaviour as they saw it in London, and contrasting with their experience in Ireland. The secular, material characteristics of London life were emphasized. Elizabeth noted the prominence of Sunday shopping and material activity, which contrasted with the observance of "the Sabbath" which she was accustomed to at home. She also felt that,

"the borderlines of right and wrong seem to merge here... with cohabiting and promiscuity and drink and drugs and everything... it's just so liberal".

This difference in behaviour was often related to a difference in psyche. Elizabeth, again, noted,

"there seems to be some spirituality lacking in the English psyche.. compared to the Northern Irish".

However, the contrast was not experienced as negative by everyone. For Mary, the shock was one which she found exhilarating. To realise,

"that people could get on without having religion as.. one of the things that you actually had to tackle before you could .. have a working relationship",

was a liberation for her: "I used to be bloody amazed", she said. She loved the revelation of so many different churches beyond the Christian ones, saying, "I thought it was so brilliant". Catholicism in Ireland, she felt,

"should be.. blasted apart with all these different religions".

When English people did attend church, their reasons were seen to be different. In Ireland, many, like Alison, said people attended out of a sense of obligation, because others would talk or because their family would object vehemently if they

did not, or else as an automatic, unthinking activity, whereas in England, people attended because they wanted to and made an active choice to do so. This was seen as preferable. One woman remarked on the greater welcome she felt she received in English churches, occurring perhaps because it is more worthy of notice when someone chooses to attend church in England than in Ireland, where non-attendance is what is remarkable.

Akenson (1988:133) suggests that Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland each divide the world into their own systems of sacred and profane. Miller, (1990:101) emphasizing what, in these terms, could be seen as the connection of 'us' with the 'sacred', asserts that Irish society holds a self-image of itself as morally superior, an attitude which arose from an early 19th century idealisation of a "semi-mythical holy Ireland".

For my informants, while Ireland and England did remain differentiated into sacred (Ireland) and profane (England), this was not assessed in a simple, good/bad way. In the same way that spirituality was considered positively by my informants, whereas organised religion and the Church were regarded more negatively, so the apparent lack of spirituality in people's lives in England was considered a negative feature by many of my informants and the Church's lack of dominance was often regarded positively. As the Church in England lacked the kind of institutional power which was experienced as restrictive by many of my informants in Ireland, it could once again be identified with spirituality, or personal faith.



This being the aspect of religion which my informants valued, the English Church was rehabilitated for them, paradoxically, by its comparative powerlessness and lack of status. I shall now look at divisions in the Church in Ireland and at what happened to these in England.

The differences between Catholics and Protestants, so distinctively marked in Ireland were, my informants stressed to me, irrelevant in England. I suggest that in fact the perceived differences remained very significant, but were transformed in various ways. The most common way in which this happened was for difference to be noticed, but the tension attaching to it to be somehow transmuted. Humour was one way in which this was effected. I have described how efficacious this was for B.A.I.S. socials in Chapter 6. It was also used by other informants.

Stephen, for example, a Catholic from the Republic, quoted various anecdotes from his involvement with the "London Irish" Rugby Club to illustrate the ease of interaction between Protestants and Catholics in the team. A defeat might be jokingly blamed on having too many Protestants in the team, for example. Or again, when the Rugby team went to Rome, some Protestants brought their Orange sashes, white gloves and bowler hats and provided an impromptu Orange parade in St. Peter's Square; this was related as a hilarious example of the way the two sets of people mingled. Rather than demonstrating the absence of religious tension, as he suggested, I felt what they showed (as with B.A.I.S.) was the effective use of humour to dissipate and transform a potential difficulty of which

everyone was aware. The awareness of the importance of the mingling also draws attention to the continued sense of difference.

This awareness was also highlighted to me by statements which my informants made which were not underpinned by humour. Catholics frequently drew my attention to their contacts with Protestants in order to illustrate their lack of bigotry. I felt this related directly to their awareness of my Protestantism. However, their desire to prove their open-mindedness was part of the idealisation that religious tension was generally absent in England and that they, as individuals, were not the kind of people to hold on to bigotry. Even if they knew only one Protestant, this link was produced with pride for me. Protestants from the North were particularly good currency for the purpose.

The extent of these transformations varied between informants. For Elizabeth, her socialising with Catholics in England differed from her approach in Northern Ireland. She did not present this with pride however. Rather, she stressed its limits. While she would be prepared to have friends who were Catholics in England, unlike in Northern Ireland, she would not consider developing a romance with a Catholic, as she remained opposed to Catholicism in principle.

Transformations could also be very context-specific, with a number of informants (including Elizabeth) pointing out that their changed attitude could not continue if they returned to Ireland. Socialising with people from the 'other' religious group was not considered feasible in Ireland. This applied

particularly to Northern Ireland, but also to Catholics from the Republic whose friendship with Northern Irish Protestants would, they felt, be strictly curtailed if they returned. Some expressed sadness at this.

While conflict on the subject of religious difference was played down in London, disagreement as to the value of religion per se could be expressed forcibly. We saw above how Breda's hostility to the Church provoked conflict with more conservative Irish colleagues. I also witnessed heated disagreements as to whether Irish agencies should have a religious dimension or not at an L.I.W.C. annual conference, the two extremes of experience being represented there by Irish nuns and religiously disaffected lesbian women. Of course, this conflict as to whether religion should play a role in one's life resided within individuals as well as between different sections of the Irish community; I have noted how it produced ambivalence and a focus on spirituality outside the Church.

When my informants come to Britain, they enter a changed situation. They are no longer surrounded by Irish people who are characterised by strong religious belief and practice, and by sectarian religious communities, but by the English, whose religious expression is very different, and by a variety of non-Christian faith communities, such as Islam and Hinduism. The Irish people whom they do meet act quite differently from how they would back in Ireland, and they themselves are at liberty to assess where they stand in relation to the religious icons and sectarian expectations of their past.

As a result, changes occurred in my informants' perceptions and practices. For some of those from Northern Ireland, the energy which had been reserved for asserting the primacy of the Catholic or Protestant faith in Northern Ireland was transformed, in the ways I show above, and transferred to the more basic question of whether the Christian faith was itself valid or valuable. For others, their existing questioning of faith and church practice which had not been allowed to flourish in Ireland, was given free reign. For some, the situation in England was liberating, for others, frightening. For all, the new situation was experienced as different, challenging, and encouraging of change and re-assessment.

Elizabeth remarked to me that religion in Northern Ireland was less a question of theology and more a question of cultural identity. I shall now focus specifically on religion as ethnic identity.

#### **RELIGION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY**

Religion is associated with Irishness (both by Irish and by non-Irish people), firstly because of the high level of practice and of belief in Ireland and also because of the extent to which it governs laws and public morality. These two areas represent the prevalence of religion as personal faith and also as cultural and social influence. Together, they produce by their pre-eminence what is popularly seen as an ethnic characteristic. Aretxaga (1997:97) puts this slightly differently, suggesting that religion provides a discourse of ethnic identity.

Secondly, religion in Ireland can be seen as affecting

opinions and identity. This is connected with expectations of what attaches to religion in Ireland, that is, political viewpoint and national identity. At B.A.I.S. conferences, introductions were based on religion and locality. People prefaced their views by saying "I'm a Catholic from West Belfast" or were introduced as "this is Alistair; he's a Protestant from East Belfast", thus contextualising their subsequent viewpoints. My experience of British people's concerns about the religion of the Irish people they encountered indicated to me that they too aligned religion with opinion, and, I would argue, identity.

Religion is also associated with Irishness through the conflict it produces, which can be implied by the above concern to place the migrant. This was a present reality in Northern Ireland during fieldwork, where the conflict was popularly understood as religious, but also connected with national identity and political aspirations as I have shown. It was also of historical relevance to the Republic. Here, pride in Catholicism resulted in part from its history of attempted overthrow by English and Scottish (Protestant) planters. It thus began in a similarly oppositional way, being identified strongly as an Irish characteristic which people had fought and died for the freedom to express; today, the absence of conflict resulting from the high degree of homogeneity means the Church is a less sectarian, oppositional force, but still identified strongly with its people.

These characteristics are underlined by the contrasting situation in Britain, where religion is less practised, less

influential, and neither forwarded as contextualising an identity or opinion, nor associated with violent conflict. While Christianity remains a cultural influence in Britain in that its values still lie behind much of Britain's norms and laws, as I have noted, it could not be said to represent a meaningful part of the British ethnic identity, due to its lack of overt influence and the comparatively small part which Christian religious observance plays in the lives of the British population.

The specific form of religion which is associated with the Irish tends to be Catholicism. Aretxaga (1997:97) suggests it was the Penal Laws of 1695 which associated Catholicism with Irishness. Catholicism was, certainly, the religion of pre-plantation Ireland. It remains, of course, the predominant religion of the Republic and is associated in the North with the fight for reunification of Ireland and the right to hold an Irish identity; Protestantism is, to re-iterate, associated with British planters and their descendants, and the continued desire to hold a British identity within the context of integration into the U.K. This is a representation: as I show in Chapter 3, the situation is actually more complex. I shall now look at what my informants had to say on the equation of Irishness with Catholicism.

Many, Catholics from the Republic as well as Northern Protestants, accepted that Irish was synonymous with Catholic. For the former, "Irish" often referred to people from the Republic and since these were almost always Catholic, Irish was Catholic. The syllogism, Irish = Republic of Ireland

(R.I.) and R.I. = Catholic, therefore Irish = Catholic, was thus employed. Catholics from the Republic, as I noted in Chapter 7, also felt that Northern Irish Protestants did not seem to want to be Irish.

However, some Protestants in Northern Ireland saw their Protestantism as a distinct part of their Irish identity. This was the case for Elizabeth. She identified herself as Northern Irish, but also, more specifically, with Northern Irish Protestants. In a politics class, she defended "my people" when loyalist terrorism was being discussed. She also said, "we're the landowning Protestant class". In this way, being Protestant was very much a part of her Northern Irish identity, as I will show later, despite the fact that she told me she felt that Irish was synonymous with Catholic. Part of the reason she felt she would not challenge the equation of Irish with Catholic was because Catholics were in the majority in the whole of Ireland and also because there were many prominent Catholic Irish émigrés.

Andrew, going further, saw himself as a "Protestant Celt". He was angry that some people excluded him from the Irish identity which he claimed, because of his Protestantism.

"How long do you have to be there?",

he expostulated;

"just because our ancestors were Scottish - we've been there for generations!"

He also suggested that instead of dividing the Irish identity by Catholic and Protestant boundaries, one should consider that there were three types of people in Ireland: Catholic, Presbyterian and Church of Ireland, each with class

implications.

On another level, while it was acknowledged that Catholicism did not represent the only form of Irishness, it could be forwarded as the most authentic form. I have noted in Chapter 7 that Irishness could be divided into more and less "true" or authentic versions. This applies to religion. Thus, even those Protestants who asserted their Irishness sometimes acknowledged that Catholic Irishness was a version which was more fully and indisputably Irish.

On this scale of more and less Irish, Protestants were portrayed in various ways by different informants, either as not Irish, or as equally Irish, or as Irish, but less so than Catholics. They were seen as influencing Catholics in the North: John, for example, said that Northern Catholics were more progressive about sexuality and family planning issues; Caroline also felt that different attitudes to divorce and contraception among Northern Catholics were a result of living with Protestants, and that the Protestant work ethic had rubbed off on Catholics there. However, this influence has been a two-way process. Living together, Protestant and Catholic have influenced each other (see Chapter 4) and for many of my informants, Northern Irish Protestants were seen as more like Irish Catholics than English Protestants.

Indeed, Northern Irish Protestants seemed to be seen as half way between the English and the Irish in the Republic, who were at opposite ends of a continuum; the Protestant work ethic was significant here, specifically to Caroline, who viewed this as the essential mediating factor. Catholics in



the North were seen, in turn, as mediating between Protestants there and Catholics in the Republic. In this scenario of inter-connections, Northern Protestants and Catholics in the Republic were considered closer together than English and Irish people, often even by those who saw themselves as British, not Irish.

Thus, when my informants considered Irishness in relation to Englishness, Protestants and Catholics in Ireland were seen as united. When removing "English" from the equation, however, as with character differences (see Chapter 7), the situation was understood as more complex and the authenticity of Protestant religiosity as an element of Irishness was questioned. The fact that this questioning was subdued when Irish ethnicity was compared to English ethnicity, shows that shared ethnicity was considered of greater importance than shared religion, even though religion was an element of this very ethnicity.

This is not as paradoxical as it seems. Religion, as we have seen, is very different in Ireland and England and this applies equally to Protestantism. In their commitment to Protestantism, my Protestant informants can thus be de-stressing their commitment to Irishness and emphasizing a connectedness with Britishness, and also, by this very commitment, emphasizing a way in which they are seen as Irish. What Protestants and Catholics share, which includes immersion in a religiously ordered culture, thus outweighs what separates them, which includes different religious denominations and national identities. These are, however,

major differences and such precarious unity is only in relation to the outsider, England.

To sum up, religion was identified with Irishness due to the importance of its cultural influence in both North and Republic, on both legal and ethical levels; the high level of commitment to it as personal faith; its association with conflict (a sign of passionate commitment) and with attitudes and identity. This was underlined by the contrasting situation in England where religion was, comparatively, a dwindling force. My informants had mixed feelings about their religious upbringing, but, nonetheless, recognised it as integral to their ethnic heritage and as differentiating them from the English.

While my informants all evaluated what they had left in a new way, the paths they took varied considerably. A minority, like Eleanor, left religion in all its forms behind. Others continued with church commitment, while voicing ambivalence. Some felt that their faith deepened in London, while others felt that it was threatened. I shall now look at four case studies which illustrate something of the variety of reactions I encountered, and also the way in which religion could span personal faith, cultural norms and ethnic identity.

#### **CASE STUDIES**

Mary was brought up a Catholic in the Republic. She fitted the category of lapsed Catholic, and was fairly relaxed about faith issues.

While having doubts about Catholicism in Ireland, Mary continued to attend Mass out of respect for her mother's

feelings. When she came to London, however, she stopped attending on a regular basis, although did attend occasionally. At the time of her taped interview, in August, the last time she had attended church had been at Christmas, eight months ago. She told me, smiling,

"I've adopted a Church of England attitude to faith.. (I don't practice any more".

She acknowledged that turning to the Church for support at the beginning of her stay could have been a possibility, but it was not one she chose:

"I suppose .. I could have been driven to going as a support system, but I didn't really, because I think I'd actually lapsed somewhat before I came over".

Her feelings were not vehement on the subject: clarifying, she noted,

"I don't .. have a .. dreadful resistance, I mean when I go, I do actually enjoy it, but it's just I seem to be doing other things on a Sunday morning which take more of a priority".

Likewise, since her sisters stopped attending church in Ireland, although this went against parental preference,

"it's not an issue that we fight over or comment on, or anything like that",

she informed me. This kind of easiness about the subject was rare among my informants.

Mary was very excited about the variety of places of worship on offer in London. She visited many different churches, mosques and so on in the first few months of her arrival "just to see what they were like" and as I have noted, found this variety greatly preferable to the situation in Ireland. She felt that in religious education in Ireland, one was led to believe that the two main religions in the world were

Protestant and Catholic "and they don't get on", whereas

"there's so much bigger religions in the world really".

Furthermore, in Ireland, she felt,

"your religion determines what you think.. like it or not",

since one is raised in it from childhood. Encountering such a variety of other options was thus liberating for her and she relished it. The lack of intensity about religion was startling for Mary and a source of pleasure. She noted that most of her friends didn't practice any religion and described them as "lapsed as well".

The concept of lapsed Catholic can be differentiated from a self-ascription as agnostic or atheist, in that it implies a continued connection with the Catholic Church which could be re-activated at some later stage. Mary's occasional attendance at church fitted in with this. She also retained some sense of Catholic teaching, telling me,

"in my .. more depressed moments, I believe that there's a nice heaven waiting to take me",

although she extended this beyond usual Catholic teaching by continuing,

" (and) I believe.. there's a nice bountiful God who'll wrap me in his arms, you know, sexually.. and look after me".

She felt that the result of having been reared in a belief system and lapsed was that, unless one actively pursued another belief system, it was hard to put a name to what one believed.

"Probably in two years time, I'll become.. a fervent Catholic again, you know... I'll be one of those.. on-my-deathbed-Catholics",

she added. While this was presented as a joke, it was a way of leaving the path open to return to Catholicism, not closing it off completely as an option. She also felt she might bring up her children Catholic, if she had any. "Religions are important", she mused,

"they mark rituals in your life.. it's like your stepping stones... to denote you moving from childhood to teenage/adulthood".

She was clear that she would not want her children brought up to think Catholicism was the only (one, true) religion, however.

Mary, while not a practising Catholic, still identified herself within the broad spectrum of Catholicism, acknowledging the effect an upbringing from childhood in a particular faith had. She left the way open for possible development of her religion in later years, and would consider it possibly worth passing on to any children she had. Her views were not strong and emotional: she gave the impression of drifting, somewhat, although her sense of Catholicism in Ireland, being presented as the one true faith, was something she disagreed with quite clearly. She liked to joke about religion and teased me that I was wasted as a Protestant, as my sense of suffering and responsibility for the world would make me a good Catholic. Her sense of her Irishness was similar to her sense of her religious affiliation, in that she liked to emphasize the fact that there were other ethnic groups around, as well as other religions, and that each had their own value.

Martin, also a Catholic from the Republic, had a religious

commitment which was much greater than Mary's; coming to London for him led to a deepening of his faith. However, he was capable of a detached and critical assessment of the value of the Church.

On one occasion, Martin told me that his faith had entailed automatic church attendance while in Ireland and nothing more, whereas he discovered something deeper in London. On another occasion, he revealed that he had attended two vocations weekends while in Ireland regarding his call to the religious life. However, he felt that some of this was wound up with the family desire to produce a second priest (one of his brothers was already a priest) and pressure from the Church, who felt they were getting someone from a "good family". Perhaps his continuing sense of vocation in England (still not acted on) began to take on more of his own spiritual direction and less of family and social pressure and for this reason, felt much less automatic. He described it as more compelling than marriage, but not right for now.

Martin criticised the reasons for church attendance in Ireland, suggesting they represented empty formality, compared to the reasons for attendance in London, which related to people's active desire to be there. His description of turning to the Church when he first arrived in London as a vulnerable teenager, "for some stability and some structure", finding "something familiar..like home" which he found reassuring, however, indicates something of the value of attending out of what could be seen as habit. He also contradicted his suggestion that Irish church attendance was

mere routine, by suggesting that there was a much deeper spirituality in Irish people than in the English and that the quality of life in Ireland was greater due to this:

"There is this.. Christian.. civilisation...this humanity. There is... a sort of spiritual nature to Irish people, where Irish people are in touch with... more spiritual, or more important, more philosophical.. that side of their life, their.. personalities. There is... an obviousness about that in Ireland that there isn't in.. other countries and I call that quality... In business in Ireland, for example, there is a line beyond which a lot of people won't go, just to make money. That.. is not in the same place, that line, in other countries".

Despite this, Martin felt an identification with English Catholicism in a way that was different from Irish Catholicism, perceiving it as an institution which was only just persisting in the face of great odds. This corresponded to how he felt about his arrival and initial stay in England. He felt his faith had developed over the years in London. Although he found it embarrassing admitting to people at work that he was a practising Catholic, conscious that this was a minority interest, he also felt that the overall meaning for a complete life was in God. On a more practical level, he felt that the Church had been a good way to make friends, and had spent a year living in the lay community of an abbey partly for this reason.

Martin's faith was, he suggested, wound up with the institutional Church. On a day-to-day level it entailed "moral principles to do with honesty and integrity". Some of these were easier than others to observe, he suggested, mentioning sexual abstinence as particularly difficult. He felt that his views did accord with the Catholic Church's

teaching, in response to a question of mine, but that they also stood on their own merits without reference to the Church.

Martin had not settled in a particular parish during his 10 years in London, and his day-to-day prayer was minimal: he suggested that he prayed about twice a month for 1/4 or 1/2 hour. Nonetheless, he considered his Catholicism to be central to his life and acted in accordance with it, for example, spending time doing voluntary work with disadvantaged teenagers, despite working long hours in the city.

Martin had some very negative feelings towards the Catholic Church as well, however. He felt that the Church had behaved irresponsibly towards his brother, a priest, regarding allegations of child abuse and he had a powerful sense of resentment because of this, which infiltrated his whole sense of the value of the Church. This ambivalence could explain his irregular church attendance.

Martin's spirituality was thus very tied up with the Catholic Church, although he felt it could stand on its own merits. Despite feeling sufficiently drawn to the Church to consider a life in religious orders, he did have ambivalent feelings about it: both an identification with it and a rejection of it. He sensed differences in Catholicism in Ireland and in England, seeing positive and negative in both. While prayer and church attendance were not necessarily consistent and central to his life, his day-to-day principles were informed by Catholic values which also directed his behaviour.

Sheila was brought up a Catholic in the Republic of Ireland, and was, at the time of fieldwork, a practising Buddhist. She described to me her struggles with Catholicism and her



attempts to be a "saint" in Ireland. She worked in the Simon community in Dundalk, a project working with homeless people and involving living with them. Workers in the project had a flat which was separate from the previously homeless residents and she described how, as part of her striving for sainthood, she invited the residents into her own flat. Such striving put a great deal of pressure on her, she felt, as she tried to be ever better at the expense of her own needs. She found that Catholicism was not fulfilling her or providing what she needed, and moved from being very devout, to no longer practising her faith in London.

Following this, a friend introduced her to Buddhism and Sheila transferred her devotion to this, finding it much more in keeping with her personality and needs. She reported that she chanted twice daily, for around 1 3/4 hours or more and attended monthly meetings. Her desire to be a saint had now been replaced with a desire to attain "Buddhahood", regarded as the highest state of being, a state of complete creativity. When I expressed interest in this, she encouraged me to attend meetings with her, clearly feeling that this was something which could be beneficial for others.

Sheila told me that she felt that religion was very wrapped up with Irishness but that people didn't quite realise how Christian their values were. She felt this was more the case in England, where people professed to be a-religious yet retained Christian values; in Ireland, people were more "up-front" about it, she suggested. She found religion in Ireland claustrophobic, however. She reported that her family's

reaction to her Buddhism was sadness and incomprehension that she could not find what she wanted within Catholicism. However, they saw that it was making her happy, she said, and had become more reconciled.

Paradoxically, Sheila felt that Buddhism had enhanced her sense of ethnic identity: whereas before, when she first came to London, she felt ashamed to be Irish, given the negative reactions towards it which she experienced, Buddhism had made her come to terms with herself, she felt, and accept her Irishness. It had also, however, made her value being a human being foremost and national identity as secondary.

Sheila's values and choices were very much affected by her faith, as her decision to go to university was wrapped up with wanting to change things and realising the value of a qualification in doing this. She wished to work in the European Community, and be involved in environmental and integration issues as a means of creating a more harmonious life and of lessening the chances of war. These values postdated her Buddhism; as a Christian in Ireland, she had felt drawn towards the I.R.A.

On the subject of bringing up children, Sheila felt that she would not send her children to convent school, which she had attended. Many of my informants supported, to some degree, the prospect of their children attending religious schools/having a religious upbringing, despite their ambivalence or their rejection of such values for themselves, and Sheila was unusual in speaking out against this. I expect this related to her having found an alternative, unlike my

other informants, who were vaguer about what they had replaced the faith of their upbringing with.

Sheila was unique among my informants in embracing a non-Christian institutional religion, and also unusual in her whole-hearted religious commitment. She transferred the Catholic devotion of her upbringing to a setting which she found suited her better, braving the disappointment of her family in order to satisfy her own integrity. She felt negative about religion in Ireland, but was more inclined to speak enthusiastically about Buddhism than to denigrate what she had left behind. Ironically, her new faith helped her to come to terms with her ethnicity more than her Catholicism had, both in accepting it, and in placing it further down her list of values. This is not as contradictory as it sounds: something which is not accepted can be more of a priority in that it causes difficulty; once something is accepted for what it is, its importance may diminish. Her choice valued her sense of what was essential for her own well-being and integrity above a desire to conform to family or cultural expectations. It is not surprising, I think, that this choice only became possible after having left Ireland.

Elizabeth, a Northern Irish Protestant, provides my last example. Her Protestantism and Christianity formed an important part of her life in Ireland, where church attendance and church values (for example, not working on a Sunday) pervaded her life. In London, she continued to be a practising Christian, seeing her faith as the foremost part of her life and identity. She attended church regularly and

prayed daily.

Elizabeth is someone I saw as struggling with the faith she had been taught by her parents in Northern Ireland. I did not see this as fulfilling her, but she chose neither to reject nor to reform it significantly. Rather, its inadequacies for her needs were attributed to her own inadequacy: she felt she ought to be more giving and more trusting, for example. When she did question, she found it difficult to justify her questioning, or to accept that there might be something worthy of criticism or reassessment in the faith she had been brought up with. Instead, such attitudes were seen as evidence of her inability to be a good Christian. She assumed that I would look down on her for this inadequacy in the same way I assume her family would do, although I offered no evidence of this.

Elizabeth described her faith as taking a "dive" in London, and referred to difficulties in being a Christian in London which were not in evidence in Ireland.

"You have to be part of this grabbing society; I mean on the underground, you just develop your elbows like the rest of them or else you're left standing waiting for the third train."

Living in London thus challenged her values in presenting her with a situation in which it was even more difficult to live up to the ideals she embraced. Furthermore, she was surrounded with people who did not believe, who went shopping and washed their cars on a Sunday and for whom God and Church seemed not to exist. This was a shock, after the religious conformism of N. Ireland. English society struck her with its liberalism, particularly with regard to sexual morals, as well

as with its materialism and secularism. She was also confronted with suffering: homeless people on the streets, for example, made her question whether God existed, although she felt guilty for doing this.

While going through a period of shock and some questioning, I felt Elizabeth did not choose to shake up her faith in a way which may have made it more her own, as this kind of individuality seemed, I would suggest, sinful to her. Clearly, she was not satisfied with the faith she did have, but she did not act so as to reform it, rather, trying to repress her questioning and conform more to the demands of the Christianity she absorbed in her home town. She compared herself to other people who were more trusting and better Christians, never criticising inadequacy in others as she did in herself.

On the question of ethnic identity, Elizabeth believed that Irish people, Protestant and Catholic, were more religious than the English. Although she felt a strong identification with Protestantism, and was clear that she would never marry a Catholic, she felt more connection with Catholics from the Republic than with the British as regards the spiritual versus materialist sides of their characters. Her religious affiliation thus, paradoxically, linked her to Irish Catholics, although part of it was comprised of stressing difference from Catholicism. Regarding the suggestion that Irish and Catholic are synonymous, she denied this on one occasion, but on another, said she would not challenge it.

When talking of what Protestantism meant to her, Elizabeth suggested:

"It means believing in a Union with Great Britain.. It means.. a link with the old Scottish Presbyterians, no matter how tenuous, even if you're a Methodist or a Baptist and it has this mentality of No Surrender and a defensive attitude... It's as if you're feeling threatened all the time. ... It has connotations of loyalist violence and terrorism",

although she dissociated herself from this. "It also means anti-Catholic", she continued,

"It has that built into it. It's an antithesis to something else, like Protestant means negative to Catholic, like black is to white; it's.. not only is it it's own identity, it's also opposite to Roman Catholic".

I asked her if it felt like a good identity and she said it was,

"because it's not Roman Catholic and I'm very biased, I suppose, because I've just grown up there, you know what it's like".

I asked how much her Protestantism was wound up with her Northern Irishness and she replied,

"Well, it's all a cultural inheritance, that from a child, religion and upbringing were all part of your culture and you.. you just grow up like this without realising it".

The fact that Elizabeth's Protestantism was a Northern Irish Protestantism is, I think, clear from such statements. The convictions Elizabeth held about her faith thus appeared more confident in their ethnic implications than in their spiritual force.

These case studies demonstrate a number of the themes I have described above and also show the variability of religious beliefs and practice among my informants. The meaning of religion to each clearly varied, encompassing personal

spirituality, family and social mores, and ethnic identity, to different degrees.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In the main, the churches did not provide a community focus for my informants in London in the way they did in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> This kind of focus is, indeed, what my informants wished to leave behind, as they associated it with unthinking adherence to dogma and unexamined cultural norms. Instead, faith became a more individual matter for my informants. Nonetheless, it was understood as, and remained part of their sense of ethnic identity, but this too was individually shaped.

Religion is a key area for construction of the self. Each person selects according to their situation, need and personality, the beliefs and actions which accord with the person they wish to be. They select and construct - or reject - a religious identity in much the same way that they construct an ethnic one, from some general elements that are on offer, moulded in individual ways. There are of course, similarities in some of the choices which are made, and to this extent, limitations on the idiosyncrasy possible.

I suggest that my informants were freed to choose aspects of religious faith which appealed to them and to reject those which they found unhelpful in the secular environment of their new country. Freed from the expectation that they would conform to the requirements of their religious community, they were able to develop an individual approach to faith.

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<sup>1</sup> This contrasts with the role the church can play for second generation Irish.

The development of one's own religious persona can involve disappointing one's family, however. Mary's fear of breaking her mother's heart encouraged her to attend Mass in Ireland. Later on, she found that her mother's heart was more resilient than she thought, but this sense of betrayal of the family is tied up with rejecting formal religious practice. This is an area in which Miller's (1990) proposals appear to have some credence for my informants. Guilt at letting parents down and at rejecting an authority (the Church) which has been tied up with parental authority for many years, is potent, but as part of developing as individuals, this is the route some of my informants have had to take.

My informants were thus faced with difficult choices in pursuing their own integrity. Some found the pressure to conform continued to exert a strong influence in London. Elizabeth, for example, remained very concerned with family views and approval, and did not feel comfortable challenging religious authority. Her obvious doubts and uncertainties dogged her, but she did not resolve them through robust challenge, as did many informants. Part of the reason for this was the importance of family to Elizabeth's sense of identity, and the greater extent to which her religious identity was also her ethnic identity.

This helps to illustrate the value of separating the functions of religion into three aspects, personal faith, cultural and ethnic identity, as doing so can make sense of much which appears contradictory. While religion can be rejected or unconvincing on one level, on another, it provides an



important identity function which is valued. Thus, for Elizabeth, religion formed a central part of how she saw herself, as a person from Northern Ireland. This had, I suggest, more potency for her at the time of fieldwork than the personal faith which she sought, but could find unsatisfying. For other informants, religion helped to define them as spiritual individuals, or as Irish individuals, or both. For most, the association of religion with cultural norms was its most unappealing aspect, as this seemed to negate their freedom to think independently.

I shall now turn to political identities, the focus of my next chapter. In the same way as my informants re-assessed their attitudes to the Church in order to develop their own personal faiths, I shall show that they also interpreted political issues so as to emphasize their personal relevance.

## CHAPTER 10

### POLITICAL IDENTITIES

#### MEANING AND RELEVANCE OF THE "POLITICAL"

"Anything could be construed as political", lamented a woman at the London Irish Women's Centre. The topic was the difficulty of the L.I.W.C. obtaining charitable status. "Particularly difficult for the Irish", added another. This raises two issues which I will cover in this chapter: (1) what does 'political' mean and (2) how does it relate to the Irish, and specifically, to my group of Irish informants?

I shall begin by giving a broad overview of these questions. I wish to approach the political in this chapter in terms of the sense it made to my informants, rather than at a more abstract level. I will draw on Samuels, (1993) who considers how the political impacts on the individual from the perspective of analytical psychology. His attempt to understand the intersection between politics and personal identity is valuable and his views support distinctions made by my informants.

While my informants described themselves as apolitical, I suggest that this refers to a distinction between two different kinds of politics and to a desire to define their ethnicity in a way which was acceptable in Britain. They, in fact, had much to say about three main political agendas, which were partition, the issue of being Irish in Britain, and sexual politics. I will explore these areas and then relate my findings to the concept of migration explored throughout the thesis, that is, as an individual journey of self-

discovery.

I suggest that there are two broad levels of politics. One is the level of formal mechanisms represented by political parties and the State. The other is a more personal and private level, to do with individual agency. My informants discussed both these levels with me.

The more formal mechanisms of political power are described by Samuels (1993:3) as

"the way in which power is held or deployed by the State, by institutions, and by sectional interests to maintain survival, determine behaviour, gain control over others and... enhance the quality of human life".

Economic and political power, he continues,

"includes control of processes of information and representation to serve the interests of the powerful".

It also includes the "use of physical force" and "possession of vital resources". This is clearly a wide-ranging kind of political power, one which has legal and official resources at its disposal, and which can impact on the individual in terms of controlling her behaviour, her knowledge and her opportunities. This kind of political power was conjured up most readily by my informants when they discussed "politics".

The second kind of politics, which is more personal and private, was also discussed by my informants, but they did not name it as "politics". Samuels suggests that this is "a feeling-level politics", which involves "struggles over agency", that is,

"the ability to choose freely whether to act and what action to take in a given situation". (Ibid:3)

This level of power is, he suggests, demonstrated through

personal experience, within families, for example. It also encompasses gender politics, which as I have indicated, is an area which preoccupied my informants.

These two political levels clearly intersect. (Ibid:4) The official level, as I have indicated, impacts on the individual. Borneman (1992) has delineated this clearly in terms of the State's influence on the individual life course. Conversely, it is individuals who together constitute the State and other constraining structures.

Politics, through these two areas, are wide-ranging and, partly as a result of this, to develop my informant's statement above, it is important to recognise that almost anything can have political resonance. Indeed, human beings' apparently limitless capacity to create meaning means that layers of political significance are added to many daily acts. At this point, it is appropriate to ask how such potentially wide-ranging political meanings express themselves in Ireland and its diaspora.

Politics have, of course, a specific resonance in Ireland. The association of "Politics" with "Irishness" is clearly made both by my Irish informants and by their English hosts. While the first question an Irish migrant in England is faced with frequently concerns their religion, the second often addresses their political alignment. This is particularly the case for Northern Irish migrants, and is a result of the high profile of "the Troubles". Due to this, politics in Northern Ireland are seen as a passionate and dangerous affair, and political conflict is represented as characteristically Irish.

However, this can be expressed the other way around. Rather than politics being a specifically Irish ethnic issue, ethnic identity in general can be seen as a potentially political issue. This is especially the case where its assertion is a matter of conflict, which is where we return to Ireland. Here, the power to define oneself ethnically is unequally shared: those in Northern Ireland who define themselves as "British" are backed in this view by the legal structures of their state, unlike those self-defining as "Irish". In the Republic since partition, the defining of oneself as "Irish" has become, of course, the legal norm. The question of ethnicity has thus been intimately tied up with political power and conflict in Ireland and Britain as the choice of a particular ethnicity entails a political alignment, which involves the choice of one government above another.

Political meaning is, as I have suggested, invasive and attaches itself to many activities. In Northern Ireland, for example, cultural preferences such as choice of music have political implications. Protestant culture offers the enjoyment of police bands, which usually play in Protestant schools or halls. These are unlikely to be attended by Catholics. Irish traditional music is, on the other hand, patronised much more by Catholics than Protestants. Within this, the level of republicanism favoured in choice of Irish songs also displays political colours. To give a third example, classical concerts are a way of choosing a non-sectarian musical entertainment which in itself makes a kind of political statement in a country where demonstrating one's

sectarian allegiance is so necessary. A wide range of other choices also have political implications. One's choice of newspaper (Irish or English, Protestant or Catholic, left-wing or right-wing) is also an identity statement, full of political meaning (see Chapter 5).

The political significance of such day to day choices is an important part of their meaning, a meaning which is context-specific, that is, created according to the background in which these choices occur. In Northern Ireland, this is a context where politics are centrally involved in an identity formation which is primarily oppositional: that is, one's religion, culture and politics all tend to be merged into one overall identity, which is opposed to the alternative overall identity. This opposition is no longer relevant for the Republic, where the question of Irish versus British dominance has been clarified with independence.

In each context, political symbols arise, which offer a dense, rich concentration of meaning. Examples include 12 July, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Bloody Sunday, the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Each of these presents as apparently one thing: a traditional march, a legal agreement and so on, yet is imbued with many meanings beyond itself, concerning victory, betrayal, oppression and much else. The symbol thus becomes a shorthand for a much larger area of political conflict and ethnic identification. (Paine 1981; Turner 1967; Kells 1986)

However, in marked contrast to the environment which they had left, my informants tended on the whole to dissociate

themselves from anything political, describing themselves firmly as "not political", "apolitical", and "not interested in politics". This in turn contrasted with the extent to which they were preoccupied with political views and positions. In other words, they contradicted this stated indifference by statements on other occasions, and also by their actions. I suggest that the kind of politics which my informants were rejecting was the politics of political parties and state structures, whereas personal politics were of considerable interest to them. However, in the course of their rejection, they had much to say about "official" politics, and I shall explore this below.

I will now move on to the three main arenas in which my informants displayed political interest. I shall begin with a general outline of these areas and then provide details on each one.

### **THREE POLITICAL ARENAS**

The first and most obvious area of political concern is, as is already clear above, the cluster of relationships between Britain, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The primary issue here is partition in Ireland and whether Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom, or join with the Republic in a United Ireland. These are the two main and opposing options; other in-between measures include devolution, power-sharing, and joint authority.

The second and related area is that of being Irish in Britain; this moves from the question of relationships between the two states and the accompanying identities which are available to

those living in Ireland, to the situation of the individual migrant in England. This is obviously intimately affected by the first issue. The third moves us to a quite different arena, that of sexual politics; this was of particular interest to female informants.

I shall now begin with the first arena, that of partition. I will suggest that my informants wished to distance themselves from party political positions on partition and that their views were complex, ambivalent and personal. They nonetheless took positions on these matters and had opinions, for example on political violence and on possible solutions to "the Troubles", both of which I shall consider.

The stereotype of political alignment in the North is that Protestants support Unionist parties, and Catholics support the Nationalist S.D.L.P. or else Sinn Féin. These are, in Ruane and Todd's terms, (1998) the political parties appropriate to their imagined Protestant communities. I found that my informants did not occupy the expected positions in this regard, although they were unable entirely to leave these behind. As I demonstrate in Chapter 3, in Ireland there is also a greater confusion of loyalty lying behind the apparent certainties which are initially presented. With my informants, this initial certainty was itself more blurred. My informants also demonstrated considerable variation and ambivalence in their views.

I shall now illustrate these features by giving some detail on six informants. Four of these were Northern Irish Protestants. Of these, only one, Elizabeth, described herself



as Unionist. She appeared the most committed to a party position of all my informants, but this was also characterised by ambivalence. Elizabeth had been a member of the Unionist party in Northern Ireland, but in Britain, felt able to see and draw attention to the intransigence of the Unionists in the current spate of inter-party talks and to feel that they were not beyond reproach. She even felt able to contemplate a United Ireland while in Britain, clearly not a Unionist option.

By contrast, Andrew said he was nationalist and presented himself as someone who clearly despised the traditional Protestant political option of Unionism. Nonetheless, he later revealed that he had supported an Unionist-led protest against the Anglo-Irish Agreement, signing a petition to protest against it. However, Andrew explained that he made this decision because he believed that the Agreement was flawed rather than because he wished to support the Unionists, and described his discomfort at the possibility that his signature could be misinterpreted by his Catholic neighbours.

Two of the others told me they were apolitical. Of these two, one (Paul) hated sectarian politics passionately, favouring instead the differing emphases of British politics. His wife was Catholic and so he had a reason to detest sectarian politics.

The second, James, also had a Catholic wife, but although he referred to himself as apolitical, he was described to me by someone else as the only Northern Irish Protestant he had

known to retain his Unionist views intact after coming to Britain. James himself described things rather differently. Rather than discussing party political viewpoint, he told me of his difficulty with British reactions to him as Irish rather than British (which would relate closely to his original Unionist position) and of having reached a crisis point about this. The context in which I talked to him was a B.A.I.S. dinner, which would affect how freely he would have felt able to talk. James clearly saw me as an 'ally', having been introduced to me as a fellow Protestant. However, his presence at such a dinner illustrated an openness to Irish and nationalist opinion which would not attach easily to Unionism in Northern Ireland and James did not define himself to me as Unionist. His mixing with Catholic Irish people both reflected, and perhaps also helped produce such change.

These four Protestants challenged, but also remained influenced by, the parties and positions which they grew up with. Two (Elizabeth and James) retained loyalty to these positions in addition to an ability to challenge their predominance. Another (Andrew) passionately rejected traditional positions in a way which demonstrated both his capacity to forge a new path, and also the emotional power these positions still had for him. Yet another demonstrated genuine indifference.

While the issue of partition is clearly located in the formal, party political arena of politics, its meaning was mediated by personal issues for my informants. Thus, Andrew was concerned about the personal impact on his neighbours of his political

decision to sign a petition; and James' and Paul's marriages to Catholic women will inevitably have affected their party political standpoints. The personal impact of this more formal level of politics was important, in different ways, to all informants.

My last two examples are both Catholics, who were interested in Republican politics, but demonstrated considerable ambivalence about this. Eleanor seemed to flirt with Republican politics by attending meetings where Republican, feminist speakers spoke, but she distanced herself from the Republican aspect when talking to me, emphasizing her interest in the speakers as women. Nonetheless, she did not attend meetings with Unionist feminists, or feminists with no party political slant.

Mary also told me she didn't attend demonstrations or "anything like that", but I knew from my experience of her that she had been at a "Troops Out" rally. I reminded her of this and she distanced herself by saying it was because of her role in a women's video group that she was there: one of their projects had been to video the march. Again, the focus was on something other than the partition-politics implied by the action, yet the object focused on - learning to video - could conceivably be found in an apolitical context, and this was not chosen. In other words, Mary, like a number of informants, took part in activities with a republican slant, but distanced herself, preferring to emphasise some other aspect of the activity.

In these different ways, emphasizing political support for a

party or ideology, then distancing oneself, or else de-emphasizing support and then demonstrating a level of commitment, my informants presented considerable ambivalence to the political parties and ideologies relating to the border. This spanned both religious and political groups. Their ambivalence was much closer to the surface than pertains, in my experience, in Northern Ireland, where camp loyalties carry so much weight. In other words, my informants often presented their uncertainties straight away, without first feeling the need to proffer a clear political position.

Although these informants were typical in a number of ways of my wider set, Andrew was very unusual in embracing the political position usually reserved for the Catholic "imagined community", that of nationalism, as very few informants embraced the politics of the 'other' religious community. This may relate to the fact that his parents were from the Republic. While my informants were able to re-examine the expectations that they would follow their religious heritage into a particular party support, and question this, it did not usually lead them into supporting the 'opposite' party, but rather into questioning the validity of such clear party loyalty itself. This questioning varied in its intensity, with some informants retaining a broad party loyalty, although with reservations, and others rejecting all the available parties and describing themselves as "apolitical".

The migration move can thus be seen as a move away from sectarian clarity, with each migrant taking larger or smaller

steps away from the positions they have left, according to how much they wished to reject them. Choosing the 'opposite' camp was thus not appropriate, as the move was not simply about rebellion against one party loyalty, but a rejection of the whole system of proscribed party positions, centring on the issue of partition.

Any discussion of partition politics must include the issue of violence, used for political ends in Northern Ireland and clearly pertinent for my informants and it is this I turn to next. This is an example, following Samuels, of a sectional interest group attempting to gain control by the use of physical force.

All informants proffered views on political violence, which mostly consisted of condemnation. As my informants disapproved of party political posturing in Northern Ireland, it is perhaps unsurprising that political violence was even more disapproved of. However, a number of people felt that political violence was acceptable in places like South Africa, but not in Northern Ireland. Indeed, this condemnation, although stated with more clarity than perhaps any other political view, was subject to some ambivalence.

To give two examples, Elizabeth, firstly, spoke movingly of having witnessed the shooting of an acquaintance of hers, a fellow student Unionist, in Belfast. This made her feel "sick" she said, disturbed her sleep, and made her feel that politics was "futile". It contributed to her desire to get involved in the Peace Movement, should she ever return to Northern Ireland, and to her feeling that the most important

political issue was to stop the violence; she also felt that any compromises should be considered in order to achieve this end. However, paradoxically, Elizabeth also defended loyalist paramilitaries on one occasion in her Politics evening class, feeling that they were too readily dismissed. Her people had simply had enough, she explained.

Martin also expressed ambivalence on this subject. He was interested in films such as "A Prayer for the Dying" which presented the I.R.A. sympathetically, had Republican friends and at one point felt that I.R.A. violence had been justified on the grounds of "minimum force". However, he also defended the British soldiers in Northern Ireland, had friends in M.I.5 and mixed with the Royal family through his work; he turned to the police immediately when he suspected he had been approached by the I.R.A. on one occasion, and felt that force was no longer justified in Northern Ireland. Given the complications of these views, it was important not to accept a first opinion on face value.

A number of informants showed a readiness to own the violence as belonging to their own community, not just attaching it to the 'other' side. Andrew, for example, felt guilt about the violence perpetrated by his Protestant community. Caroline, a Catholic from the Republic, expressed great mistrust of the Unionists to me, but otherwise, most people were inclined not to blame the other community.

However, blame was levelled at the Irish community in Britain. A view expressed repeatedly, was that support for the I.R.A. was greater among the Irish community in Britain, than in

Ireland. Caroline told me emphatically that she would "never" get involved with Irish political groups in Britain, as they were "all" I.R.A. supporters; once you got noticed for sympathising with them, they would never leave you alone, but would "put the finger on you", she suggested. Another man was suspicious of an Irish educational institution as being a "gun-running enterprise". There was thus a fear that other Irish people in Britain supported violence and that one must be careful. This seemed equally shared by Catholic and Protestant informants.

Perhaps this can be understood in terms of the strength of my informants' desires to distance themselves from the established party political positions in Ireland. Those Irish migrants who took alternative positions were perceived as so anathema to my informants that they associated them with that most extreme political position in Ireland, violent republicanism.

As part of the context of violence, finally, it is important not to overlook the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act (P.T.A.), considered in certain circles as an unacceptable example of state violence. It followed the 1973 Emergency Provisions Act, and was brought in after the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974. The P.T.A. extended the jurisdiction of the Emergency Powers Act into Britain as well as covering N. Ireland and gave sweeping powers of arrest, search and detention. Those detained could be held seven days without charge and 48 hours incommunicado, without access to solicitor or any telephone calls. No safeguards were built in

to prevent abuses. Out of 7,000 people arrested since the beginning of the Act, over 6,000 have been released without charge, yet those detained have been held for a total of around 200 years of detention. (Hillyard 1993) It is thus widely seen as being simply used to terrorise and undermine the Irish community and as such, merely to extend the violence in Northern Ireland.

Concern about this legislation does not rest solely with nationalists/republicans. The Committee for the Administration of Justice in N.I., formed in 1981 to campaign for human rights and for an end to the emergency legislation, draws support from all sections of the community in N.I. Nonetheless, in my experience of being brought up in the Protestant community in Northern Ireland, I would say that this was not generally seen as relevant to Protestants, but associated by them with the republican or nationalist cause. I shall now look at my informants' responses.

Breda told me she was "terrified" to go home because of the possibility of detention at ports through the P.T.A. However, despite numerous reports which emphasize the state of fear which this legislation is said to induce among ordinary Irish citizens, my informants (Catholic and Protestant) did not complain widely about it and were much less likely to take a position on this than on the paramilitary violence it was brought in to tackle.

I suggest that this was directly related to my informants' attitudes to political matters in general. None of them had experience of detention under the P.T.A. and therefore this



legislation did not have a personal impact on them. They did not wish to oppose it on principle as this would have been, I suggest, associated with the formal kind of politics in Northern Ireland which my informants saw as extremist and from which they wished to distance themselves.

My informants' dislike of stereotyped positions did not lead to apathy or to neutrality and they were ready to proffer possible resolutions to the conflict. Indeed, some felt it was essential to have a view. Caroline said this and criticised Séamus Heaney for trying to avoid taking sides in a radio interview. You must take a side, she said: you can create one, if you don't like the existing ones. Martin also stated,

"I think it's important as an Irish person to have a view",

continuing,

"Irish people have a responsibility to.. be informed... aware... to have a view and.. to try to promote ... that... to extend that view into some kind of involvement".

While other informants did not state this so clearly, many did have views on the future.

Working for peace motivated some of my informants more than party political solutions, that is, working first for peace, as an ethical priority, regardless of the political situation, rather than working to change the political situation in order to lead to peace.

More, however, took an interest in political solutions. Views mostly separated into favouring devolution or a united Ireland, but these were not adhered to in a sectarian or rigid

manner, and my informants described changes in their opinions over time. Devolution was mentioned by both Catholics and Protestants, with Protestants acknowledging the importance of power-sharing with Catholics. Those who wished for a united Ireland tended to describe it as preferable or romantic, rather than economically or otherwise viable. My informants also supported inter-party talks, which were taking place during my fieldwork and some emphasized the European context as the hope of finding a way forward. In these ways, their solutions involved distancing themselves from dogmatic positions, although not rejecting existing proposals for resolution. However, they also advocated broadening the traditional options and talking to the traditional "enemy".<sup>1</sup>

My informants also liked to personalise this issue. For example, Martin spoke of the importance of "correcting" British people when they demonstrated ignorance about the situation in the North, a personal way of working for change.

In these ways, my informants held individual and personal opinions on party political solutions, not rejecting party politics entirely but mediating them with liberal and more open-minded views than were at the time of fieldwork prevalent in Northern Ireland itself.

So, my informants, especially Northern Irish informants, held views on the parties in Northern Ireland, on the use of

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<sup>1</sup> Post-fieldwork, this approach predominated in Northern Ireland and led eventually to peace.

violence to attain political ends, and on possible political solutions to "the Troubles". These views were characterised by variation, complexity and ambivalence. My informants distanced themselves from stereotypical positions and indeed, were quick to display their rejection of the party loyalties expected by their imagined communities. While ambivalence about these positions has been shown, by Ruane and Todd and others, to exist beneath the surface in Ireland itself, my informants displayed their ambivalence with a readiness that would not, in my experience, occur in Ireland. The act of migration thus facilitated new ways of looking at the issue of partition, and a new freedom to express old doubts.

With regard to my informants' attitudes to politics in the Republic, the most common statement made about politics in the Republic was that the Church was too involved with the State. This was expressed by male and female informants, from the Republic and also from the North. One woman felt divorce should become a constitutional right and all religions should be given equal rights; others talked less specifically.

Another statement made by some was that all the parties in the Republic were similar. Caroline suggested that as a result, no-one was particularly interested in politics in the Republic, compared to the "obsession", as she saw it, in Britain. This is clearly a generalisation and another informant, Sheila, for example, had a history of political interest and involvement in the Republic.

None of my informants, however, were passionate about politics in the Republic. In particular, Martin was very negative

about Irish politicians, describing them as "parochial". He found English politics much more impressive, with greater competition for seats producing higher standards in his view; by contrast, he was embarrassed to hear Irish politicians on the television. It is worth observing that Martin stated a wish to become a politician in the Republic one day, despite, or perhaps because of this negative assessment. While others were less negative, no-one was particularly interested in political parties in the Republic.

However, my informants showed more interest in evaluating politicians as individuals than in dissecting the claims of particular political parties. For example, Stephen told me he did not vote in England because no-one had bothered to deliver leaflets, so he did not know what the individuals were like. At home (the Republic) he voted according to whether the individual was a good worker, rather than according to party, he told me. This accords with Hazelkorn's (1986) analysis, which I refer to in Chapter 3, whereby a patron-client relationship is established with individual T.D.s, who are evaluated according to their effectiveness in dealing with individual issues, rather than supported because of party preference.

I now move to British politics. These were represented, particularly by those from the North, as very different from the politics they were used to. Their reactions varied from committed to apathetic. Paul and Alison suggested that British politics were much more interesting, being about "real" issues such as housing, hospitals and so on, rather

than a cover for religion, as in the North. Elizabeth, secondly, was probably the most informed and involved in British politics of all my informants: her job demanded much up-to-date political knowledge; she studied for an A'level in Politics while in London, which largely covered British politics, and she described herself as very interested in current issues and policies. I found her very up-to-date on each bill and debate passing through the House of Commons. By contrast, when I asked Mary, who described herself as not political, what she thought about British politics, she said "I'm even worse there" and lapsed into silence.

My informants were largely willing to describe themselves in terms of being left/right/centre. Some located themselves as firmly left-wing. This dovetailed with any republican interest, Labour having been the traditional party to support if one favoured the "Troops Out" position (although this changed under Tony Blair's premiership, from 1997). Some non-republican informants also embraced left-wing policies; other self-designations were "centre-left" or "centre-right". This kind of description tended to be favoured above a clear alignment with a specific party for most. None of my informants described themselves as "right-wing" to me, although one said he voted Conservative at the last election, and others clearly supported right-wing policies.

However, there were notable exceptions: one person complained what a British way of thinking this represented, that it felt alien; another, Andrew, complained that people tended to assume he was socialist, because of his views, which he found

very irritating, as he hated being pigeon-holed; however, he did describe himself as "centre-right", so did not reject such alignment altogether. A few, female informants tended to express concern about "green" issues, independently from the established parties.

A disinclination to favour British political parties was also expressed in voting patterns. Of the seven informants who discussed voting with me, one expressed a preference for voting in Ireland, but could not do so because of the constitution of the Republic. Of the remaining six, half did not vote. Of those who did, one had voted in N. Ireland (by post) in her initial years in London, although this had changed by the time I spoke to her, and she had started to vote in England. Two voted Labour, one Conservative, but all added caveats limiting support. Overall, there was a sense of distrust of party politics.

This contrasts with Belchem (1985) and O'Day's (1985) analyses of the Irish in nineteenth/early twentieth century Britain. Belchem looks at the importance of Irish involvement in Chartism in Britain and O'Day considers the extent to which Irish votes influenced British political outcomes. While O'Day concludes that their influence was small, he challenges the suggestion that this was because the Irish were insufficiently integrated to have developed an interest in British parties. Ryan, (1990:62) furthermore, notes that over 150 Irish-born candidates stood in local elections in Britain in 1971 (75% standing for Labour); this showed an increase of 100 over the previous election. These findings draw attention

to the significance of Irish political involvement.

However, my informants were not active in British politics. They tended to express more interest about these than about politics in the Republic, but less interest than they had in partition and N. Ireland. The dislike of pigeon-holing and disinclination to align oneself clearly with a political party was clear here as in other political areas.

I shall now move to the second major political arena I wish to detail, that of being Irish in Britain. As ethnic status has been self-consciously politicised in order to obtain certain benefits, this is political in the first sense defined by Samuels. The Irish in Britain lobby promotes a sectional interest, using its power to maintain survival, enhance the quality of life, and control the processes of representation. As I have shown, groups have formed to work for political, civil and welfare rights and benefits for the Irish in Britain and there has been a campaign by certain Irish groups to gain ethnic minority status for the Irish, in particular in the Census, although this had not, at the time of fieldwork, been successful.

A few of my informants were interested in this kind of political activity, and I will detail this below. However, not all Irish migrants will identify with this politicised reading of their status, and many of my informants, in fact, did not. Rather, they were more likely to experience this on Samuels' second political level, which was a personal, feeling level. Thus, they often felt undermined or uncomfortable when they were the butt of Irish jokes or stereotyping, but could

experience this simply as a personal discomfort, taking it no further.

My informants varied in the extent to which they perceived being Irish in Britain and its attendant difficulties as a personal issue for them, or as a sectional issue for their ethnic group. As I indicated earlier, they were often unwilling to complain of prejudice or discrimination or to avail themselves of Irish welfare organisations. However, they did locate themselves within a sense of Irish community, and joined Irish groups which were not overtly political. In this way they did identify with being "Irish in Britain", but in a more personal manner.

I shall now look at the ways in which it was possible to act in the formal political sense on the issue of being Irish in Britain. This kind of politicised activity worked from the premise that the Irish: (i) were a distinct community in Britain; (ii) suffered certain inequalities; and (iii) deserved recognition and assistance. It could have two foci: lobbying either the Irish or the British governments.

Pressure on the British government could be in several areas. Firstly, regarding civil rights, the P.T.A., as described above, was opposed by various groups. Regarding welfare, there was the option of trying to obtain money from the British State for the Irish as a community. This was an increasingly popular way of working to improve the lot of the Irish person in Britain at the time of fieldwork. My informants did not tend to be actively involved in pressuring the British government in either of these ways.



Some informants, however, were involved in applying pressure to the Irish government. This was with a view to encouraging it to do more for its migrants. There were limits to their involvement, however. I attended an Irish in Britain Representation Group conference to which a speaker from the Irish Embassy was invited to talk on this subject. The antipathy towards him was very great, as he was challenged strongly on government policy. This was a much stronger reaction than that shown by my informants, who did not support the I.B.R.G., identifying it closely with republicanism and with the kind of extremism and party loyalty, transferred from Ireland to Britain, which they abhorred.

For those who were involved in this kind of activity, however, there was a strong sense of the government in the Republic having used migration to solve its economic ills, and having then abandoned its migrants. Deirdre translated her concerns about this into action, targeting the Irish government in a group called "The Emigrants' Voice", which fought for Irish people to have the right to vote in Ireland. (As Miller notes, (1990:107) Ireland is the only country in Western Europe where migrants cannot vote in their country of origin.) She described a demonstration where they posted blank voting slips as a symbolic protest.

My informants also had other, more personalised ways of trying to affect events, including attempts to influence people living in Ireland and in England at a non-governmental level. Deirdre, who was the most involved of my informants on Irish in Britain issues, attended emigration meetings which aimed to

de-mythologise emigration and educate people about its attendant difficulties; she, additionally, joined "The Irish Teachers' Voice", for support in her work in London, but also to promote the equality of status of Irish teachers, something which she and others felt to be in doubt. Here was an example of an individual applying her personal political energy to an issue which was for her both personal and at the same time representing a sectional interest.

The politics of being Irish in Britain could be seen as more acceptable by some of my Catholic informants than partition politics. Caroline, for example, suggested that the Camden Irish Centre was a worthwhile Irish organisation because it was "apolitical", by which she meant it focused on welfare. The term "apolitical" was thus used to mark approval. However, these informants did not usually translate this into action in the sense of involving themselves in Irish welfare organisations, much as they did not choose to be recipients of these services.

The denominational divide of my informants was significant in this issue. For those Protestants who did not identify themselves as Irish, the act of claiming Irish status in London had different connotations, being readily seen as political. Thus, Protestants who saw themselves as British would be unlikely to seek involvement in this arena.

Overall, my informants wished to dissociate themselves from sectarian, party politics. For Catholics, this was expressed through their approving of welfare organisations. Instead of doing this by recognising that these organisations embodied a

rather different kind of politics, they did so by claiming that their activities were simply not politics. As for Protestants, they dissociated themselves by straightforwardly avoiding organisations which promoted Irish in Britain issues.

Thus, Irish in Britain issues motivated a few, Catholic informants, in the sense that they wished to use official channels to advance their political ends. In a more personal sense, being Irish in Britain exercised many more informants, in that their personal agency and self-definitions were affected by other people's attitudes to them as Irish migrants in Britain. This could be experienced differently by those who saw themselves as British (often Protestants) and those self-defining as Irish (often Catholics).

I shall now move to the third political arena, that of sexual politics. As with Irish in Britain issues, this represents a mix of sectional interest, for those who wished to improve the lot of women, and personal impact for those for whom gender issues were experienced in a predominantly personal way. This topic was a very important and central one for some of my female informants, from both the North and Republic, although for others, it was of no interest and for yet others, somewhere in between. It was not, with one or two exceptions which I look at later, an issue for my male informants. There are two general issues involved: feminism and sexual orientation, which I shall deal with in turn.

My female informants varied in whether they saw themselves as feminists. While these women could be said to have benefitted

from the gains of the feminist movement in the 1970s, having had their options widened, some chose to reject the label "feminist". A number did this even though they had been involved in feminist issues and groups. Others did see themselves as feminist while yet other informants fell in between these two poles.

Related to this, sexism was an issue for some informants. The awareness of sexism forms part of a feminist discourse, in which it is seen as a continuing consequence of earlier forms of male domination. My female informants varied dramatically in their attitudes to this. Breda spoke frequently of her experience of sexism and how upsetting it was; Alison denied experiencing it. I shall now examine four women's views on these matters, which illustrate the variability among my informants.

Elizabeth said,

"well, I don't profess to be a feminist, but because I inherently believe men and women are equal, so women don't have to shout it from the rooftops... I think femininity is important.. in terms of.. well, of being different from men".

She felt that it was important to, "try to look nice and.. exude feminine decorum", but that she was lacking in this. She spoke of a model she had met who was "the epitome of femininity for me", being very attractive in both appearance and personality.

Caroline, secondly, often talked about the differences between women and men and complained of her experience of sexism at work, where a male subordinate had great difficulty with the fact that his boss was a woman and where male colleagues

patronised her. I asked her once if she considered herself a feminist and she said, "Yes, I probably am". She supported women's equality and rights and was angry about sexism and discrimination, yet clearly did not readily adopt the self-definition of feminist.

Alison declared,

"there's sexist remarks, but they're just sort of part and parcel of everyone, you know, it's just part of growing up really... I've never really come across any sort of .. sexist ... discrimination or anything, really, no".

Her hesitation showed how unfamiliar the subject was to her, and although she clearly had experienced sexist remarks, she was unprepared to problematise such experience.

Breda, finally, clearly saw herself as a feminist and talked enthusiastically about the women's movement. Significant aims of hers were feminist, as she longed to set up a women's paper, for example. She was very sensitive to her female friends and colleagues' acquiescence to stereotypical gender roles and complained of her female flatmates cooking meals for men and of her female colleagues and others giving to the point of "self-extinction" (a sacrifice she felt was too readily accepted by men). At the London Irish newspaper where she worked, she felt constantly undermined by sexist remarks and attitudes, as I have shown in Chapter 5.

I attended a play that Breda co-wrote on one occasion. Her boss remarked to me that it was the sort of play for which men would be advised to wear bullet-proof vests. I assumed he was exaggerating, but in fact the play was a very hard-hitting, gender-focused one, containing much anger. It portrayed a futuristic scenario where men were returning to their communities after a long absence at war, to find the women

running them. This proved extremely problematic for the men, who turned to violence against the women, and another, gender war ensued.

Sexism was seen as particularly prominent among Irish men. For some of the women this made it difficult for them to identify with any sense of Irish community or even with an Irish identity of their own. Breda's experience at work alienated her from Irish men and a number of women talked of Irish men being more sexist than the English, although the latter were far from exempt from the charge. This was experienced as disappointing. This sexism was deemed to exist both in Ireland and among Irish men in England. Other issues emphasized this split, including that of abortion. Breda, for example, found that her newspaper editor refused to print anything favouring abortion, fearing to offend the Church. She found this very frustrating.

While the experience of sexism could lead to a split between male and female Irish, shared feminism and Irishness could lead to very close bonds between some Irish women. These were readily found at the L.I.W.C. and also at a number of groups which originated at the Centre or sprang from annual conferences they arranged. Here, as I describe in Chapter 5, feminist and republican views prevailed and Irish women were welcomed to a space where they could have both their gender and their ethnic identities valued. This was particularly valuable to those who found male Irish networks unhelpful. I had a sense of very strong bonds having been formed here among a core group of women, who experienced oppression on both ethnicity and gender fronts. For some, the L.I.W.C. was, indeed, their only connection with "the Irish community".

The connection between feminism and republicanism is an interesting one. While both exist separately, for some women, they combined powerfully. My informants, however, tended not to be strongly republican. Women I talked to who were involved with the L.I.W.C., or with other groups which had a republican focus, expressed ambivalence about their involvement, as I have noted, distancing themselves from republicanism. Feminism would thus seem more acceptable than republicanism to these women. However, as I have shown, for a good number of informants, feminism was also a source of ambivalence and distance.

Aretxaga (1997) explores this inter-relation in some detail, providing an in-depth analysis of the inter-relation between gender and nationalism in Northern Ireland. She considers how the political subject is formed within the discourses of nationalism and feminism and suggests that the heterogenous views held by women complicate the binary divisions into unionist/nationalist, and Catholic/Protestant which are so often forwarded. (Ibid:4) (This, of course, also applies to men.) I have explored the inter-relation of gender and ethnicity in more detail elsewhere. (Kells 1985) Here, I shall simply highlight the issues and recognise that they pre-occupied some informants in the ways I have shown.

Finally, I suggest that the different extents to which these women were prepared to self-define as feminist, or to define sexism as a problem, related to the differing ways in which they experienced gender issues as political. Thus, if they saw sexism as a problem facing all women, this would imply a

sectional interest. Some women, however, saw this as a personal issue which specifically impacted on them as individuals.

I shall now look at the issue of sexual orientation. This issue was, as I have noted, a source of conflict within the Irish community, as Irish gay men and lesbians were faced with a conservative attitude among many of their compatriots, which, backed by the churches, rejected homosexuality as a morally acceptable way of life. Many lesbians were deeply disillusioned with the Catholic Church in particular, due to its attitude to lesbian and gay sexuality.

The issue also caused conflict within the Irish women's community in particular. Many of my heterosexual informants felt very uncomfortable with lesbian Irish women. Some of those who came into contact with lesbians through their involvement with the L.I.W.C. described to me their shock or distaste, as I have noted. This kind of response led to wariness among some lesbians and could result in lesbian-only social groups being used as a refuge. There were, thus, strong feelings on the issue of sexual preferences which divided Irish migrants, within my set of informants and outside it.

One man talked to me of sexual experiences he had with men in his past. He visited gay bars occasionally, and took me to visit one, but was very unclear about whether he would class himself as bisexual or not. For him, this was a private and confusing matter, and not one which led him to any kind of political view or activity regarding gay rights. Rather, he



said he would react with "compassion" if anyone told him they thought they were gay, but kept his own sexuality largely unknown. None of my other male informants discussed their sexuality with me and I felt unable to raise these matters with them.

However, in the period after my fieldwork, I encountered the founder of "Amach Linn" for "Irish lesbians and gay men in London". He, a gay Irish man himself, had been struck by the dearth of organisations for Irish gay men, which had prompted him to found one. Amach Linn describe its aims and activities in "A Guide to London for Young Irish people" as follows:

"to advance the social and cultural welfare of Irish lesbians and gay men in London and to provide a visibility and awareness of the distinct experience of being Irish and lesbian or gay. Holds regular social events such as céilís, social groups and monthly administrative meetings - see Irish/gay press for listings. New members always welcome". (A.G.I.Y. 1997)

The choice of "Irish" or "gay" press draws attention to the either/or nature of these two groupings, a situation which Amach Linn is, of course, trying to change. The same guide also draws attention to an Irish gay help-line, but despite listing many gay organisations, can offer no others which are ethnically specific.

Overall, the issue of sexual orientation is one which can powerfully split the "Irish community". Attitudes to gender politics, more generally, also have a highly divisive potential. In both of these cases, some informants experienced these issues simply on a personal level, and other moved from this to embrace a more campaigning role. On whichever level they were experienced, these issues could

motivate my informants, specifically female, lesbian and gay informants, very deeply, and thus, the conflict between them and their attachment to an Irish identification, also felt deeply, could be very confusing.

It is perhaps for this reason that groups where these informants could meet others who shared their views on gender and their sexual orientation, as well as their ethnicity, could be profoundly important. As we have seen, however, these groups were sparse, and for gay men, their journey was often taken without the formalised group support of like-minded men. The decision whether or not to search for other people like oneself, is, indeed, all part of the individual journey. I would now like to return to this journey, by which migration offers choices and self-discovery, and relate it to the political issues covered above.

#### **THE INDIVIDUAL JOURNEY**

My informants tended to eschew political parties and the more official kind of politics in favour of an individual, personal approach. This could be expressed in a number of ways: by distancing themselves from issues such as partition, the biggest party political question in Northern Ireland, also relevant to the Republic; or through expressing interest in politicians as individuals rather than as exclusively representing parties; or else by choosing to support individual or emotional issues.

I shall now give some examples. Martin, a Catholic from the Republic, suggested,

"I have strong political views, but... they don't have to

do with labels like that;<sup>2</sup> they have to do with ... freedom and democracy and self-determination and justice and ... combatting poverty and helping disadvantaged people, people on the street. That's what my politics is about".

Martin was unusual in seeing himself as being strongly politically motivated, and also in his long-term ambition to become a politician in the Republic, but typical in his support of issues over parties. Other examples include Caroline, who was interested in "green" issues rather than the Green Party, and described herself as against consumerism and homelessness; and Stephen, who was motivated by concerns about education, hospitals and fair tax, and criticised aspects of both Conservative and Labour politics. Finally, "no one party has everything right", said Andrew.

These choices formed part of my informants' individual journeys and self-development: away from the family and social influences of Ireland, they were freed to develop their own ideas about politics in Ireland, to discover more about politics in Britain, which offered different parties and issues, and to explore what it was to be Irish in Britain, and whether this seemed a political issue for them.

For those from the Republic, this individualistic attitude was already familiar in that T.D.s were often voted in on the basis of their individual worthiness rather than out of party loyalty, as I have described. For them, this re-evaluation process was a gentler matter, a continuation of a behavioural pattern already familiar.

However, for those from Northern Ireland, party loyalty had

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<sup>2</sup> That is, nationalism, unionism and republicanism.

been everything, and people had been expected to vote in a manner dictated by their religious upbringing. Such change represented for them a much more radical break from what was known. It was also a change they embraced with more enthusiasm. Their desire to avoid being "pigeon-holed" (Andrew) in terms of politics, as on other issues, could be very great and highly motivating and could lead to a passionate rejection of the party obligations they had known. This did not mean that they stopped being political people, but rather that they moved towards the second kind of politics I have highlighted, namely personal politics.

Personal change through migration was a vital theme for all of my informants, with the move to Britain acting as a context for this change. The particular form this took was different for each individual and varied according to the history which each of my informants brought with them, including whether they travelled from North or Republic, and also according to what they needed or wished to find. I shall now give a few examples of the political changes my informants underwent post-migration.

Elizabeth suggested that moving to Britain changed her political orientation in that it gave her "perspective", and made her able to see events "more objectively". Her new-found ability to understand the English view was what moved her towards seeing that the Unionists she previously supported fully were intransigent and could perhaps be expected to compromise more. Andrew (also a Northern Irish Protestant) felt, in contrast to Elizabeth, that he had become more

understanding of the Unionists, having previously condemned them.

Change was not necessarily permanent. Elizabeth's ability to contemplate a United Ireland when in Britain did not, she suggested, apply to past or future residence in Northern Ireland. For her, certain views were appropriate in England which would not be appropriate in Ireland. In other words, fitting in wherever she lived involved holding different attitudes in different places. Change was thus about personal integrity and discovery, but also had a pragmatic aspect, relating to comfortable survival in one's environment.

Other change was spoken of, post-migration, in terms of seeing partition and other political issues as less clear-cut.

"I've sort of gone into the area where I don't really know what to think",

Mary, a Catholic from the Republic, said. This sense of things appearing more complicated when outside Ireland applied to a number of people who had previously held clear-cut views on the issue of partition. For some informants, the act of migration was central to their movement away from a more clearly defined party politics. One man, more generally, spoke of becoming less "naive" about politics; another suggested he was more focused on the humanitarian aspect than before.

While the nature of my informants' personal development and change varied, the pursuit of freedom and the desire to find what it was they believed, away from the socio-familial influences of 'home', was held in common. The extent of this varied: some informants were dissatisfied with the limitations

of political possibilities and the dominance of partition-politics when in Ireland, whereas others found the experience of migration kick-started a re-evaluation process once they had left. However, the openness to change was present in the choice of migration itself. This made it possible to re-evaluate traditional certainties, producing degrees of openness to alternative positions which varied, but which were in all cases greater than what was easily possible in Northern Ireland. In that sense, migration itself was a political act, involving personal agency, and through it all informants had chosen to shake up the 'givens' in their lives.

While this was part of the meaning of migration for my informants in the 1980s and 1990s, interestingly, in a talk I attended, given in a Social Work forum in the London Borough of Hammersmith, (27/11/89) it was suggested that the Irish had, historically, never voted en bloc, but individually; that despite some efforts to mobilise the Irish vote in a particular direction, Irish immigrants had traditionally held on to their individuality and voted according to varying preferences. In this respect, such favouring of individuality would seem to be, in a broader sense, part of what it means to be Irish in Britain. (O'Day 1985:103)

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

To sum up, my informants stressed that they were not political people, but it was clear that political issues were meaningful and motivating for them, as they exhibited political interest in a number of areas: regarding the future of Ireland in its relation to Britain, the main topic of politics in Northern

Ireland; regarding their position as Irish immigrants in Britain; and on the subject of sexual politics. Additionally, they held opinions on the political systems in the Republic and in Britain.

I suggest that this contradiction can be understood by differentiating two different realms of politics: an official level, in which state, institutional and sectional interests attempt to deploy power; and a domain where private issues of emotion and personal agency pertain. My informants had things to say about party politics in Northern Ireland, and had views and preferences. This would be unavoidable after an upbringing in this context. They were, however, inclined to disparage current parties, to distance themselves from stereotyped positions, and to emphasize an individual perspective. What motivated them most was therefore the chance to distance themselves from these positions and express a different kind of personal politics.

My informants thus moved towards personal politics by re-interpreting party politics from a personal perspective, but also by focusing on issues which had personal meaning for them. This had different implications for informants from the Republic, where politics had been evaluated in a more individual manner to begin with, as opposed to the situation in the North, where parties rather than individual workers or issues were seen as demanding loyalty.

Partly, this disparaging of parties could be seen simply as a fashionable view point among young people in London of any ethnicity. It could also be seen as self-protective for those

informants who were anxious about what my loyalties were. These are indeed strands of the meaning of such a position, but they are far from the whole story.

For all informants, evaluating political issues - both the familiar, based on ideas about partition, and the new, based on their new position as a migrant in Britain, or a new-found freedom to develop ideas about sexual politics - was part of a journey away from the known and proscribed positions of Ireland, to a fresh vision of individuality and of what it meant to be Irish. Politics in the North had formed such a central part of how the individual was expected to conform to social expectations, that this represented a particularly potent area of rebellion or re-evaluation for informants from there.

This returns us to the question of why my informants denied that they were political people, in the face of clear evidence that they did in fact hold political views. I suggest that my informants, in choosing a more personal political route, did not designate this as "politics" because politics for them had quite different connotations. Thus, my informants associated being "political" with an image of fanaticism and terrorism, from which they felt a strong need to dissociate themselves. This related to their backgrounds in Ireland, where the conflict over partition was such a central political issue, especially for those from the North. In the Republic, more steps had been taken to distance politics from this issue.

In Britain, however, the situation took on a new dimension,



due to sensitivity to Britain's role in the conflict. Here, my informants feared being dubbed "political" as they felt that the British also associated the politically active Irish person with violence. This was on two levels, official and personal. The British State's role in controlling terrorism meant that Irish political organisations in Britain, and more widely, Irish migrants in Britain, were assessed for potential threat, with the use of special powers such as the P.T.A. Secondly, the British public were seen as suspicious of the possibility of Irish violence and my informants were concerned about having good personal relations with the British people they encountered. This personal, relational aspect tended to concern them more than fear of the P.T.A. and the State, but both were relevant to their situation.

To deal with these difficulties, my informants did not try to suppress their Irishness as a self-protective measure. Instead, they offered an alternative image of themselves as Irish people: although Irish, they were "not political" and therefore not dangerous. As long as they made this clear, they would be safe among the British, both in emotional terms of feeling accepted, and in terms of physical safety and survival, by not being targeted by British security.

This represents a quite different view of Irishness from that of some second generation informants I encountered at the beginning of my research. For them, political "correctness" was the absolute defining quality of being truly Irish. In the absence of birth in Ireland to validate their claims to Irish ethnicity, their political authenticity, expressed in

active support for republican political strategy, was vigorously asserted.

My informants were engaged in a more subtle exercise, in defining their Irishness in less stereotyped ways. Their motivation was, thus, not only negatively derived from the fear I describe above, but part of an active engagement with discovering what they felt about being Irish. The sense that occupying the role of vehement political expression did not represent who my informants were - "I'm not a stand-up-and-shout person", as one man put it - also motivated them to, finally, outside Ireland, be able to express a different way of being Irish.

My informants thus rejected, not just republicanism or violent republicanism, but the wider notion of sectarian opposition. To be "political" was seen as continuing to support such positions, and this meant being associated with aspects of being Irish which they positively disliked and found limiting: namely, extremism and "pigeon-holing". In wishing to reject this, they might, thus, find themselves agreeing with Yeats that,

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity". (1965:58)

Finding a different way to be Irish involves constant re-working and is a creative process, rather than a fixed position. It should be remembered that re-evaluation of what it means to be Irish is also going on in Ireland. Foster (B.A.I.S. lecture 5/10/95) draws attention to the changing nature of nationalism in the Republic, for example. This is, he suggests, no longer the original referent that Northern

Ireland nationalists looked to; nor is it the "bogeyman" which so appalled Northern Irish Protestants.

My informants found this re-evaluation a difficult and challenging process: they risked conflict with other members of the Irish community, whose views were more in keeping with the norms of Irish society in Ireland, and this could lead to ambivalence about involvement with this "community" and to a sense of not fitting in, either in Ireland, or among Irish people in Britain, which could be painful.

However, what made these risks worth while was the freedom my informants gained. In England, they were free to discover and express other kinds of politics, such as sexual politics, where they could challenge rigid sex roles and expectations. They also came across new issues such as being Irish in Britain. For some, these were motivating, for others not. Political activity or interest in the latter was a way of working through what it was for them as individuals to be Irish in Britain, one way of working out this new identity. Pressure on the Irish government regarding its attitude to migrants was also a way of remaining involved and active in Irish politics, and in Irish identity, without occupying the stereotyped positions on partition.

Once again, the importance of seeing my informants as individuals comes across clearly. My experience was that they varied in the views they held, in the areas they politicised and emphasized, but shared an emphasis on their individuality and on their tendency to ambivalence, to complication rather than clarity. This, as I have shown, applied much more widely

than to their political positions. It was part of their developmental paths in Britain, as they learned to find their own feet, their own individual positions, and to evaluate what they had absorbed before. While, paradoxically, they may have found themselves treading similar paths to those chosen by other middle-class, young Irish migrants, these were still the paths they as individuals had chosen, not those which had been presented to them at birth, and as such, each path was their own individual, ever-changing creation.

## CHAPTER 11

### CONCLUSION

#### **ETHNICITY AND INDIVIDUALITY: FROM IRELAND TO BRITAIN**

The central dilemma for my informants, and I would suggest for Irish migrants generally, was how to be an individual and also be Irish. This was to varying degrees conscious and appropriate: obviously, there were major variations in life circumstances and in factors such as class and age. However, the dilemma remained an important and abiding one. It was demonstrated among my informants by the considerable contradictions in their statements and actions regarding ethnicity; by the accompanying emphasis on their individuality; and by the way these two options could be presented, consciously or unconsciously, as contradictory and difficult. (That is, either I was told that they were contradictory and difficult, or I could infer this from information given to me.)

This sense of contradiction meant not only an inner conflict, but also confusion with regard to other Irish people, in relation to whom my informants felt both connected and separated. As I revealed in Chapter 1, often the first thing my informants said to me was that they would not be relevant to my research, as they were "oddball"s, not like other Irish/Northern Irish people. This was so common a statement, as to seem almost an article of faith of the Irish migrant. This sense of difference from other Irish people applied to my informants' life in Ireland, fuelled their desire to migrate, and remained important to their experience and choices in

London. Let me deal with these three areas in the order in which they took place, by recapping and developing findings in the thesis. I begin with life in Ireland, dealt with in Chapter 3.

On the whole, Irish society is characterised by close bonds in a number of areas, which could be viewed positively by those subject to them, as the care and concern of a close-knit community, or experienced negatively, as repressive restrictions. Family forms one such bond. Family loyalty is considered of great importance; ways of expressing it include: frequent visits to family members, living in proximity to them, accepting family opinions, marrying a "suitable", approved partner, and standing up for family members and views in public.

Religion provides another example, entailing loyalty to one's church and religious community, through activities - which include church attendance and mixing with people from the same religious background - and through attitudes - such as suspicion of alternative religious views. Closely related, ethnic loyalty involves defending or expressing one's ethnicity through a wide range of markers: choice of school, friends, partners, leisure activity or location, place to live, attendance at appropriate marches (12th July or St. Patrick's Day parades) and many more. The degree to which people conform to these lists of regulations will of course vary, some being more total in their allegiance than others, but the expectation that a majority of the norms will be respected is clear.

Gender roles have also been distinct in Ireland, in accordance with conservative church teaching (both Catholic and Protestant) on the appropriate roles of men and women. The Constitution of the Republic enshrines the role of woman as home-maker, and in farming families in rural Ireland, the traditional pattern continues of men as farmers, women as wives or dependents, and of patrilineal land inheritance. Gender loyalty is not demanded in the same way as family and religious/ethnic loyalty - the options are not so rigidly and comprehensively defined - but it provides another example of clear expectations attaching to one's role in life.

The individual's behaviour in Ireland is thus circumscribed according to what could be described as the accidents of birth. While it could be argued that religion, for example, could be changed, and one could choose an alternative ethnic designation in the North, this underestimates the powerful forces acting towards keeping one in the camp one inherits. Furthermore, changing religion is more likely to render one a "turncoat", than a Catholic/Protestant, that is, produce an entirely new category.

For the majority of my informants, such bonds were considered restricting. One woman described how she was constantly identified in her home town in Ireland as "Paddy McLaughlin's daughter", her father being well known locally. Her reaction to this, as I have noted, was to insist "I'm myself and nobody else"; this response can be seen as a key theme in the self-identification of my informants generally, and additionally, as a central part of their motivation to migrate.

The discovery, in Chapter 3, that my informants considered life in Ireland to be limiting and claustrophobic forms a major component of the "why" migrate question, posed in Chapter 1. This dissatisfaction relates closely to their desire to express their individuality. Do these two issues also reveal "who" migrates, that is, provide a migrant profile, another traditional preoccupation of migration theorists?

In answering this, it is important to notice that many changes are happening in Ireland, and that there are alternative lifestyles available. The feminist movement has been vital, challenging traditional roles, and has led to some striking changes in public life, for example, the election of a liberal, feminist woman, Mary Robinson, as President of the Republic in 1990; religious/ethnic boundaries in the North have been transcended by the Peace Movement, by cross-community organisations and other such movements; a lesbian and gay network is lively, if not large; and there is increasing secularisation reported in the Republic.

The existence of these movements reflects a growing dissatisfaction with current systems and may stir up greater popular awareness of their limitations and the need for change. It demonstrates that not all those who feel frustrated by Irish conventions leave. The choice for those who dislike aspects of life in Ireland is in fact threefold: to take part in working for change, to accept things as they are and make the best of it, or to emigrate. The experience of dissatisfaction, even when combined with a desire for



greater freedom of expression, is thus not sufficient motivation to migrate, there being other options available to improve the situation. Those who choose to migrate must therefore share some additional characteristics which prompt them to leave.

So what characteristics are necessary to produce a migrant? I suggest my informants: (i) shared a strong drive towards personal autonomy; (ii) held the notion of personal fulfilment as a major life goal; (iii) felt that the above could not be expressed adequately in Ireland; (iv) had insufficiently positive experiences and relationships in Ireland to tempt them to remain; and (v) had felt the lure of the new and unknown, stimulating curiosity, interest, and the desire to broaden their experience. Of course, media coverage, geographical proximity and shared language render Great Britain a partially familiar destination, but this combination of known and unknown may be particularly potent, offering excitement without a frightening degree of risk.

Others may share in one or more of these characteristics, but it is the combination of all five which distinguished my informants and which prompted them to leave. For example, others may possess the need for personal expression, but find a community within Ireland which satisfies enough of it (such as the small gay community in the cities) to remain; or they may choose involvement in a movement which works openly for social change, such as feminism, and find fulfilment in challenging local norms from inside; again, they may be more attached to the positive things which Ireland has to offer, or

the relationships they have which are rooted there to decide to leave.

So, while my informants may share significant characteristics with certain of their compatriots, because they experienced all five, or else, perhaps because their experience of one or all of these characteristics was more intense and overwhelming, they have chosen to put their energy into exploring something new rather than working to transform the old.

The mixture of negative reactions to the country of birth and positive expectations of the proposed destination could be said to represent the traditional mixture of push and pull factors shown in the literature, but the content and complexity of these is very different from the economic factors frequently stressed. Concepts of personal growth and fulfilment were the currency for my informants, rather than jobs and income.

While the question of migration is complex, the stress on individuality, most clearly highlighted by the phrase "I'm myself and nobody else", was evidently an essential part of my informants' motivation to migrate, if not the only factor; it was also fundamental to the way in which they understood themselves, before, during and after this process.

Having chosen to come to London, my informants found that popular culture underlined their individualistic emphasis, as I note in Chapter 1. In addition, the setting of the urban environment, considerably larger than any of the urban centres in Ireland, provided much greater scope for autonomy. London

can thus be seen as an excellent location to explore and validate the longings and sense of difference which propelled my informants to leave. In part, this is what happened.

However, while ethnic bonds felt constricting in Ireland, and the emphasis was heavily on the desire for independence, once in Britain, the situation changes. As I indicated in Chapters 5-8, my informants, when in Britain, emphasized their ethnicity to me - variously reported as Irish, Northern Irish or (regional) British - either by their words or in their non-verbal actions. I considered what they did in Chapters 5 and 6 and in Chapter 7, what they said about their ethnicity. These were both affected by initial reactions to London, on first arriving, covered in Chapter 4.

Ways of talking about Irishness included: simply stressing that it was important; speaking of the differences between Irish and English people; retaining an Irish accent; talking of symbolically important dates, such as 12th July or St. Patrick's day. Non-verbal actions included: joining with Irish activities or associations; mixing with other Irish people or in Irish locations; reading Irish papers; attending Irish dancing classes; visiting Ireland frequently. Interestingly, some of these overlapped with what was demanded of ethnic loyalty in Ireland. Others related to the new situation in Britain.

I discovered that each of my informants found their own way of emphasizing both their individuality and uniqueness to me, and also their Irishness and ethnic connectedness. None chose to emphasize only one. The distinction between speech and non-

verbal actions becomes very important here, as the desire to emphasize both of these aspects found expression in striking contradictions between saying and other ways of doing, which I dwell on in Chapter 8. Thus, what people said tended to be at variance with their other actions: if they mixed to a large extent with Irish people, they tended to suggest that their ethnicity was of minimal importance to them; whereas if they mixed hardly at all with them, and rarely involved themselves in Irish activities or centres, they tended to emphasize the importance of their ethnicity, by speaking passionately and in detail of it to me, and it seemed to others. This represented a clear general trend.

It is important to recognise that the situation often changed for my informants as well, as they became strikingly more or less involved in Irish activities over time. This was generally represented as discovering something: either the importance of being with other Irish people, or the value of being separate. It did not necessarily lead to fewer contradictions, however, in what they said and did.

This was not the only way in which contradictions were expressed, however. Within verbal and behavioural realms themselves, the situation was similarly ambivalent. If I look first at what people said, informants from Northern Ireland would, in fact, emphasize different ethnicities at different times, whether Irish, Northern Irish or British. This applied to both Catholics and Protestants. They also emphasized contradictory feelings about these ethnicities. In the Republic, there were fewer choices, as my informants did not

consider describing themselves as British as an option. However, they could emphasize Irishness, or de-emphasize it, and some did alternate between these options.

In doing, secondly, there were no cases of complete assimilation - into either English or Irish communities. If I analyze this briefly by looking at residence, work and leisure spheres, I found that most choices of residential area and work place, firstly, were not Irish. In leisure, however, there was a much greater favouring of Irish activities or settings. Some people valued the Irish pub scene; others chose different activities, for example, Irish theatre, university associations, sport, or dancing. Yet others mixed to a large extent with Irish people, although not in Irish activities, and perhaps not in Irish-dominated locations.

For those who chose to act in a way which drew attention to or validated their ethnic origin, it was thus in leisure activities more than in any other sphere, where they emphasized their ethnicity. It can be seen, however, that the way in which they did this, the precise formulation of ethnic activities or locations, varied according to personality and goals. Even in emphasizing common ethnicity, therefore, my informants expressed something of their individuality.

How can we understand such information on ethnicity? There are in fact a number of ways of making sense of the contradictions presented here, some of which I have highlighted before and some I will outline for the first time. Schildkrout's (1974) suggestion, firstly, that it is not the

content of ethnicity which is as important as the principle of difference, remains of interest. According to her theory, actual content may vary and is of secondary significance. Certainly I have found that content does vary; unlike her, I have chosen to focus on the permutations, rather than dismiss them. However, the emphasis on principle of difference is relevant in that this is something about which there tends to be agreement among my informants. Even those informants who considered themselves British, on arrival in London found that there were significant differences between themselves and English people. (Often arrival experiences could be quite shocking in this regard, as I show in Chapter 4.)

Secondly, following Holy & Stuchlik, (1983) the discovery of contradictions need not be surprising, if one remembers the different levels of reality they distinguish. Amina Mama (1989) has developed a similar idea, suggesting that the emphasis on unitary self as normative is in fact a Western discourse based on hegemony. It has, she suggests, led to the generation of academic concepts like cognitive dissonance, and explanatory terms like "compartmentalisation", to explain the holding of different ideas at once, when this is in fact "normal".

Heaney and Kearney, looking at such contradictions in the context of the Irish, suggest that a doubleness of focus can be understood as a specifically Irish characteristic: Heaney describes this as the ability to acknowledge the claims of contradictory truths without choosing between them and,

"our capacity to live in two places at the one time and in two times at the one place". (1990:13)

This dense image draws attention to an artful way of dealing with contradiction as something which is specifically part of Irish experience. Living in two places at the one time could describe the Irish migrant's experience of living in England, while remaining connected to life in Ireland; similarly, the Irish person in Ireland (or indeed outside it) can inhabit different ways of being Irish at one time. Continuing with this image, as regards living in two times at the one place, this could also describe the migrant, whose present is in London, but who additionally inhabits, in memory and reflection, a past which is in Ireland.

The complications of the position of the Irish migrant are thus neatly encapsulated in this image. Nonetheless, like the preceding theories, this would also prompt the theorist away from dwelling on why contradictions arise, suggesting that one merely accept them as the norm. Furthermore, helpful as Heaney's image is for my purposes, I would question the idea that tolerance of contradictions is uniquely Irish. De Vries, (1995) for example, demonstrates the contradiction which Turkish girls experience between disliking the constraining effects of gossip, and valuing their ethnic identity, of which gossip is constituent.

While I consider that this "normalisation" of contradictions provides a significant caveat, I still find it worth investigating what lies behind them. The richness which they can communicate or illustrate is well worth emphasizing: the presentation of contradictory information calls out for attention and interpretation which can uncover deeper insights

than might be accessible through consistency. I will illustrate this by a brief description of the topics of religion and politics, dealt with in Chapters 9 and 10, before moving on to a consideration of what, overall, the contradictions could be said to show us.

On the topic of religion, firstly, contradictions took the form of derisive and valuing statements being made by the same person, or else of negative statements being accompanied by church attendance. When I looked more closely at this, it became clear that the apparent inconsistencies made sense when one differentiated between what my informants had actually experienced, and what religion symbolised, culturally, now that they were living in England.

Thus, informants tended to remember their religious upbringing as oppressive, as having forced them into certain beliefs and actions. However, they had begun to value the greater religiosity of the Irish, as opposed to what they saw as English secularism; in this sense, they identified with their religious heritage and could act on it, for example through church attendance or ethical behaviour.

The contradictions in this case could be resolved for some of my informants through an appeal to the notion of "spirituality", as distinct from religious dogma. They could thus see themselves as 'spiritual', rather than, for example, as 'a Northern Irish Catholic', with all the baggage this entailed, although this did retain its relevance to varying extents. Such an approach afforded the possibility of continuing with their religious heritage, an important element



of their ethnic upbringing, but re-evaluating it in an individual way. They could thus discover new respect for this element of their ethnicity, while re-forming it so as to leave room for their individuality.

On political matters, secondly, most informants stressed that they were not "political", but further probing led to considerable evidence of opinions or activity which could readily be designated as political. Focusing on this led me to question what "political" represented for my informants, as the term was clearly something they wished to dissociate themselves from. I suggest in Chapter 8 that their dissociation was in fact from one of the stereotypes of the Irish, as political fanatics, and as violent threats to their English hosts. This shows the kind of pressures and also the coping strategies which the violence in Northern Ireland has produced for Irish migrants in England. It also shows one of the ways in which they manipulated their Irishness to suit their individual needs.

So, these examples demonstrate how trying to understand the reasons behind contradictions can reveal helpful information on what my informants valued and rejected, and on why they acted as they did. It can also show the various meanings which were compressed in apparently single issues, and the juggling which my informants did to live comfortably in England.

To return to the broader picture, an important way of conceptualising the contradictions which my informants displayed is through the notion of remembering and forgetting, which I raised in Chapter 1. There I asked whether my

informants found it important to remember or forget their ethnicity, or both. The answer, in short, is both. In the sense that individual difference was sometimes stressed over what was held ethnically in common, my informants were choosing to forget their ethnicity; but as they also demonstrated ways in which they were attached to it, so they were also remembering it.

Appealing to or playing down ethnicity at different times was also accompanied by emphasizing different ethnicities at different moments. This can be recognised as situational ethnicity, which may thus be interpreted not just as a way of remembering and forgetting, but also of remembering different things at different times.

To understand why this happens, I suggest that Glazer & Moynihan's (1981) emphasis on the "interest" value of ethnicity is crucial. For middle-class informants, the need to obtain government funding, an obvious example of one strategic value of locating oneself within an ethnic group, was not compelling. However, more personal values replaced this, for example, the desire for prestige, or to blend in, to appear cosmopolitan, or to feel safe. Ethnicity was thus manipulated for individual interest, in particular by Northern Irish informants, both Protestant and Catholic.

Understood in this way, we can see the relevance of Goffman's (1971) vision of the manipulating individual and the image management s/he indulges in. This is another valuable way of conceptualising what is happening. I thus see my informants as choice-making individuals who were capable of assessing the

value and relevance of their ethnic heritage, selecting what they liked and wished to emphasize, and ignoring the rest.

However, there is more to the picture than the manipulation of ethnicity. Glazer & Moynihan also emphasize its "affective" value. For my informants, this could include emotional attachment to family and friends in Ireland, to deeply held early memories and formative experiences, and to whatever was remembered as positive or compelling about the period of life which they spent in Ireland. To deny such experiences and memories, especially early and formative ones, would be emotionally costly.

The emotional importance of belonging is also relevant. In England, the media reinforce the sense of difference from the English, emphasizing either 'backward' laws in the Republic, for example regarding divorce or contraception (although great changes are taking place in the Republic as I have described), or "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland. The persistence of Irish jokes and stereotypes contribute to this sense of difference, as does the experience of having one's Irish accent identified as different. Such experiences affect the possibility of unmediated and simple belonging in England, and can push people back on their memories of where they imagine that they do belong.

Paradoxically, an alternative reaction is to distance oneself from embracing Irishness, to sidestep English hostility. Some of my informants reported that they had done this initially, but in England discovered that their Irishness went too deep

and had too much importance to continue denying and, as a result, changed their attitude and actions in order to embrace it more.

The essential point here is that even where ethnicity is strategically unhelpful, it retains an emotional power which encourages people not to deny its claims. The potential conflict between self-interest and emotional connection is only one way in which the overall conflict which my informants felt can be expressed, namely that between wishing to identify with and affirm their ethnic background, and wanting to break free of it and be an individual.

So far, I have concentrated largely on what my findings revealed about my informants. However, they also offer a compelling picture of ethnicity itself, and I would like to consider this briefly now.

Ethnicity presents itself, through this material, as a series of fluid options which can be selected from according to aspirations and goals. It can thus be represented as a reservoir of possibilities, available to those with a claim on it. However, it is important to note that there are outer limits, established by socially accepted norms, on what - or who - can or cannot be included. These cannot be presented as rigid and definite boundaries, as they are not immutable, but rather, a subject for potential conflict and disagreement.

To offer just one example, some Irish people believe firmly that second generation Irish are not in fact Irish, while others insist passionately that they are. Descent is thus

emphasized by some second generation Irish people, while birth within Ireland itself, together with an upbringing within its boundaries (both physical and psychical) is paramount for others, including my informants.

We can see here the generality of the belief that there are outer boundaries, with some people or expressions of identity 'in', while others must be 'out'. The principle is therefore more agreed upon than the content, which is a subject for often passionate disagreement. This is, of course, precisely Schildkrout's point. However, one could also say that the principles themselves are disagreed on in the sense of whether descent, blood, essence, or environment and interaction are favoured as guardians of ethnic purity.

As I note in Chapter 8, Irish ethnicity in Ireland differs from Irishness in England, having different meanings attached to it. If I can illustrate this by one, central example, ethnicity tended to be taken for granted by my informants while in Ireland, but what frustrated them there was the expectation of sameness it entailed. This does not mean that ethnicity was homogenous in Ireland, but that expectations of the different groupings it subsumed were, as I demonstrate above, experienced as stifling. It is worth adding that conceptualising this frustration as a problem with "ethnicity" is something which comes with distance (both my informants' distance and my own), as when in Ireland, it was seen by my informants as being more a problem with their precise location.

Having moved to Britain, my informants' ethnicity became a

sign of difference when they mixed with English people, and this, when not coupled with rejection, was often highly desirable to them. Their desire being to express their individuality, ethnicity became a means to this end, rather than a frustration of it, a highly significant difference. It would thus seem that the ideal for my informants was to have enough ethnicity to stand out from the English community, and not so much as to be absorbed by the Irish community.

It is clear from my research, however, that there are numerous subsets of "the Irish community", sometimes in opposition to each other. These range through class, gender, sexuality, age and political differences, among others. Attempts by Irish groups or individuals in Britain to portray "the Irish community" as a homogenous and unified entity, can thus be seen as rhetorical statements, made for a strategic purpose - whether to unite disparate factions in a common aim, or obtain government funding - and ought not to be taken at face value.

To sum up so far, the conflict which my informants faced, and which was expressed in their contradictions and ambivalence, was between valuing individual freedom and valuing belonging to an ethnic community. Their desire for the former had led to their leaving Ireland, viewing life there as restrictive, limiting and claustrophobic. It had also led to their need to see or present themselves as different from other Irish people.

The need to belong to the Irish community, on the other hand, was rooted in early experiences of being part of this

community, which were central to my informants' senses of who they were, despite their grievances about aspects of it. The wish to belong was also manipulated by others' negative reactions in England, which made it both harder to belong to a sometimes reviled community and also, paradoxically, more important, in the sense that belonging somewhere was valued.

On top of this, there were aspects of their Irish heritage which my informants simply liked and indeed preferred to English society (such as spirituality), and there was the strategic value of ethnicity, which could be as simple as providing the opportunity to be seen as different, something which my informants valued.

Overall, the reaction of my informants to these complicated and conflicting needs, was to steer a course between both individual autonomy and ethnic belonging, rather than embracing or denying either outright. I suggest that this whole process, of moving between different poles in this manner, can be understood as dialectical.

If we regard the way in which my informants saw themselves as the same as other Irish as the thesis in this process, then the way in which they felt separate is the antithesis. It is in the synthesis of both that some kind of whole identity is formed, an identity that needs to reflect both the need to belong to ethnic community and the need to distance oneself.

Another way of phrasing the dialectical pattern is to distinguish what people said (thesis), from their other

actions (antithesis); the combination of both of these, in the synthesis, then represents the formation of their own, individual identity.

I suggest that both of these dialectical processes reach a resolution through Anderson's (1991) notion of imagined community. The appeal to imagined community means that one does not need to act out one's Irishness, through living in an Irish area, or mixing with Irish people, to be Irish. Instead, one can refer verbally and imaginatively to the notion of community as including oneself. Through this notion, one can therefore be both part of the Irish group and also separate, expressing both of these truths through apparently opposing statements and action.

Thus, for those who acted on their ethnicity, but denied its importance, what they were doing was denying their involvement in this imagined community, saying their actions were individual actions relating to individual friends or preferred locations. In their imagination, they were not part of the Irish community, and this left them free to act how they wanted, and feel they were expressing their individuality. The appeal to, or denial of, imagined community was a creation of each individual and thus differed in each case.

A resolution of this dilemma can also be seen in the act of migration itself. As I suggest in Chapter 1, the journey of migration is not only a fateful moment in the life of each individual migrant, it is also a meaning-creating event in itself. For my informants, the space which moving away from Ireland gave them, made it possible to claim aspects of their



ethnic identity which they found were valuable. In an evaluation process made possible by distance, they were able to sift their experiences and discover good as well as bad. In claiming individuality, paradoxically, they found it possible to reclaim the ethnicity they had rejected while in Ireland, as a choice rather than an obligation.

Secondly, migration is necessary for the maintenance of the Irish economy: an expectation that it will continue is built into economic policy in the Republic, and unemployment figures in the North are prevented from soaring by its continuation. The fact that migration has been established as a pattern from the time of the Great Famine also means that it has become embedded in Irish culture: migrating is something Irish people do, and it is expected. In fact, Ireland lauds its successful migrants, those who have forged a literary or political stance for themselves, as if it takes the credit as much for encouraging them to go as for producing them.

In the fact of migration, we thus see a combination of individual autonomy and of culturally sanctioned norm. Individuality is stressed by making a move and choosing an independent life outside Ireland; yet in the way that this is also an established part of what it is to be among the enterprising Irish, so it also emphasizes the Irishness of the migrant, who is choosing a culturally accepted path. For Irish migrants in England, it is also worth noting that the position of being a minority group in a dominant culture is itself part of Irish historical experience, so, even this aspect is resonant with what it is to be Irish.

Irish migrants can thus help the Irish economy by leaving, contribute to the cultural pattern of migration, and fly the flag for Ireland by making a success of their lives outside, all of this while exploring their wish for autonomy and separation.

APPENDIX 1<sup>1</sup>

MIGRATION FIGURES

NET MIGRATION FROM THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND 1881-1976

PERIOD	TOTAL NUMBER
1881-1891	597,325
1891-1901	396,414
1901-1911	261,539
1911-1926	405,029
1926-1936	166,751
1936-1946	187,111
1946-1956	316,331
1956-1966	292,608
1966-1976	43,000

CENSUS YEAR	ENGLAND & WALES	SCOTLAND
1901	426,565 (1.3%)	205,064 (4.6%)
1911	375,325 (1%)	174,715 (3.7%)
1921	364,747 (1%)	159,020 (3.3%)
1931	381,089 (0.9%)	124,296 (2.6%)
1951	627,021 (1.4%)	89,007 (1.7%)
1961	870,445 (1.8%)	80,528 (1.6%)
1966	878,530 (1.9%)	69,790 (1.4%)
1971	685,620 (1.3%)	35,365 (0.7%)
1981	579,833 (1.2%)	27,018 (0.5%)

Note lessening of emigration to Scotland in the course of the 20th century. This period also showed an increasing preference for S.E. England as a destination, and in particular, London.

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<sup>1</sup> The Census figures quoted here are found in Ryan 1990:47.

## APPENDIX 2

### CORE INFORMANTS

In this section, I shall provide some sociological detail on my twelve core informants, in order to provide a background picture to their comments throughout the thesis. I define core informants in terms of the quality and breadth of information which these individuals supplied. The level of contact I had with this core group varied. Some I met very frequently and we became, to varying degrees, friends (Elizabeth, Martin, Caroline, Mary, Breda, Deirdre) while others, I met more rarely, yet they still provided a great deal of information (Andrew, Stephen, Tony), and some I knew already (Paul, Colm, Alison). I attempt to give a portrait of each informant, with a particular focus on the extent to which they utilised Irish networks, mixed with Irish people and sought out Irish venues. I also consider what they felt about these choices. I have made certain, small alterations in order to protect confidentiality and have used pseudonyms here, as throughout the thesis.

#### COLM

Colm, a Catholic in his early 20s, came from the same town as me in Northern Ireland; we remained in touch in London after he emigrated in 1988.

Colm felt that his reasons for migrating were not worth discussing, as being in Britain was like "working in the next town almost". He said,

"I've been watching British shows and identifying with British ways of life since I was 10",

and as a result, living in London was

"not such a huge step. It's not into the unknown".

Following a conversation in which we had joked about missing Irish food, he said,

"for you and I, the only major change is beef sausages; we both miss them".

Probing his motivation more deeply, he told me he had moved "for political reasons" primarily and described how tired he was of "the rhetoric" in Northern Ireland: "I was sick to my soul of it". His girlfriend was a Northern Irish Protestant (who had emigrated shortly after him), which contributed to this response. He thought that "curiosity" had also prompted his move, that he had nothing better to do and "maybe you need a break after 20 years in one place". Lastly, he had six members of his family living in London. He thus concluded that his motivation was, in fact, a "very confusing old thing actually".

Colm's family were, in fact, a considerable support to him. When he first emigrated he moved in with a brother and his two English flat-mates. He also obtained work through family contacts, as his brother helped him obtain work as a research assistant.

Colm also socialised a lot with his family. I was sometimes invited as I was from the same town and known to them. The sisters held family dinner parties which the brothers perceived as condescending. They lived in upmarket areas of London and had integrated more fully than many of my informants, with less concern to retain a connection with their Irishness. The brothers lived in less expensive settings and tended to meet more informally, for example,

going to the pub. They did not hold dinner parties, and were less interested in being accepted by the English. Of the family members, I met Thelma, Alistair and Bob individually and, as I note in Chapter 2, observed the rest in group settings.

Discussions in the family when I was present often focused on their Irish origins. This could be through teasing each other about sounding parochial, when an Irish term or pronunciation was particularly striking, or laughing at the differences between Irish and English ways of speaking. My impression was that Irish dialect was enjoyed as well as mocked. This would correspond to Herzfeld's (1997) notion of "cultural intimacy". The sisters' accents were less pronounced than the brothers, but when together, my impression was that everyone became "more Irish" in their ways of speaking. Memories of Ireland were discussed, often with fond laughter.

Two of the family members had Protestant partners, and friendly teasing occurred about this, emphasizing the peculiarity of Protestants; my presence also contributed to this and it felt entirely good natured. Rural-urban divisions were also highlighted in these gatherings, as one of the spouses was from Belfast. "You'll have to excuse us... we're from the provinces I'm afraid", one of the sisters said in a show of self-deprecation. Discussions were held about the English and about integration, sisters and brothers often clashing about this.

I experienced the family as close, despite the tensions I witnessed. The family network was significant, in different

ways for each member. It had helped Colm find accommodation and work, contributed to his social life and to his sense of being supported in London. This kind of base greatly eased the difficulty of striking out alone.

Apart from his family and girlfriend, Colm avoided Irish people in London. This avoidance was, I suggest, of Irish people whom he experienced as being in some way extreme. This was expressed in a number of ways. Firstly, he avoided Northern Irish Protestants, saying he felt "a bit paranoid" about them, whereas, he felt "a wee bit more in common" with Catholics. From my prior knowledge of Colm, I know that this represented a significant change, as he had socialised in mixed company in Northern Ireland and had abhorred sectarian bigotry. He speculated that an Irish person emigrating "to escape these divisions" might find "that he really brings (them) with him anyway".

However, I suggest that Colm feared re-encountering the sectarianism and prejudice which he had emigrated to escape. His Protestant friends in Northern Ireland had shared his views, but unknown Protestants might not. They were avoided, therefore, out of fear that their views might embody the kind of narrow-minded extremism which he disliked so much in Northern Ireland.

Secondly, Colm avoided Irish locations and the kind of people who sought these out. He told me

"I didn't come all the way over to England to live ...in an.. Irish community"

and, like many, was disparaging of Kilburn. We went to Irish pubs in Kilburn occasionally (see Chapter 5), as an experiment

on his part and because he wanted to help my research, but this confirmed his original feelings as he disliked them intensely. Colm considered people who did not wish to integrate in some way to be behaving in an extreme and narrow-minded manner and he did not wish to associate with them.

A third type of Irish person whom Colm avoided was the republican activist. He described his horror at meeting three men from his home town, quite by accident in a pub. He had avoided these men in Northern Ireland because of their republican sympathies. Thus, he was trying once again to avoid the political extremism which caused him to emigrate.

Fourthly, Colm wished to separate himself from the loud, drunken person who behaved in what some informants described as a "stage Irish" manner. I witnessed him being very embarrassed by an Irish woman on the tube, for example, who was loud and drunk, and he encouraged me not to attract her attention in case she talked to us. A number of informants felt embarrassed when other Irish people behaved in this manner, drunkenly or loudly, and I experienced these feelings myself.

However, Colm could express his desire to avoid Irish people in a more general way. When discussing his chance meeting above, he exclaimed that these men and he had nothing in common in Northern Ireland and now,

"don't have anything in common besides the fact that we are all Irish".

He then described himself as having "more in common" with a



Welsh friend than with his townsfolk. Still, despite such a general statement, Colm's dislikes were usually of particular kinds of Irish person, as described.

Other kinds of Irish people were appreciated by Colm. So, he enjoyed meeting Irish individuals in non-Irish pubs, where he was not overwhelmed by Irish people. He also drank in a pub close to his work, as he liked the Irish landlord, who was friendly and gave him good service. On one occasion, he accompanied me to an Irish play, "Irish Night", which dramatised the experiences of Irish migrants in Britain. I was surprised that he wanted to come. He told me he enjoyed it, and had "identified" with it. Certain Irish social events were thus interesting to him, as were isolated Irish individuals.

Colm was, however, keen to integrate into English society. Work was his main route into making English friends and he was positive about his English colleagues, whom he socialised with. He did complain of English prejudice, and of being associated with terrorism, but did not attach this to his colleagues.

Overall, Colm's family and Northern Irish girlfriend were of central importance to him, he was open to individual Irish people who did not overwhelm him, and also to the occasional Irish event. However, he was also keen to mix with English people and not retain a narrowly Irish focus. I suggest his experiences of "the Troubles" had led to very negative associations with Northern Ireland and to wariness about any connection with sectarianism. Thus, like all informants, in

London he wished to retain those Irish connections which he valued and discard those which he disliked.

#### **CAROLINE**

I met Caroline, a Catholic from the Republic of Ireland, in February 1989 at a women's writing workshop in the Haringey Irish festival. She socialised with some of my other informants at the L.I.W.C., but did not meet these women individually or outside the Centre.

Caroline was in her early 30s, an academic, had done her Ph.D. in California, then lived in Ireland, New York, London, and finally returned to Ireland in the early 1990s. She chose London out of a desire to return to "Europe", and judging the job opportunities to be good here. She often contrasted London with the U.S.A. In London, she said,

"I found it more difficult to get to know English people in London than I did to..get to know New Yorkers in New York".

London was

"a predominantly English city and other people were foreigners, so it wasn't cosmopolitan in the same way..migrants didn't have the same degree of acceptance as found in the U.S.".

For this reason, she considered living in an Irish area in London, unlike in the States, but eventually bought a flat in a non-Irish area. She said this was because Irish areas were too expensive, but also expressed a desire to "live in a place where there were a lot of different cultures". She lived alone.

Caroline mostly discussed Irish friends and when we went out together, the friends she encountered were Irish. She agreed,

"I tend to have..more Irish friends or people with Irish

.. connections than English friends",  
again, unlike in the U.S.A. She related this to English unfriendliness, but also said, as did many informants,

"it wasn't really a conscious decision, it was just I think that these people were easier to make friends with ...the Irish are just more open".

We socialised at Irish venues at her suggestion: pubs; literary events, including book fairs, and poetry readings; social clubs, including the "Irish Network"; and any other Irish event she had noted in the "Irish Post" and was enthusiastic about. She reported similar choices with other Irish friends. She also read Irish papers, celebrated St. Patrick's night and visited "home" twice a year. She offered to teach me Irish language when I was experiencing difficulties with it and discussed Irish people and topics with enthusiasm.

Caroline also attended some non-Irish groups: a Ramblers club, guitar class, Yoga, sculpture and three writing groups, although she found Irish writing groups more exciting. She did try to make non-Irish friends and attended non-Irish events, but had disappointing experiences, and returned to her Irish networks. Part of this disappointment was her experience of prejudice from English people, which she contrasted with Irish friendliness. She suggested that

"what (English people) consider having a good time often seems to me quite dull...I mean when you see English people in the pub..they never sort of break their hearts laughing or anything".

She searched out Irish people as a result, "for a bit of crack".

Caroline had one serious relationship with an Irish boyfriend,

who emigrated with her to the U.S.A., but this broke up. She told me she was open to dating English boyfriends, but expressed concern that this would involve her in their English networks. On the whole, she preferred Irish men, suggesting that they showed their feelings more, were more relaxing to be with and one had more in common with them. However, she had met boyfriends at work in the past, a non-ethnic avenue.

Gender was significant to Caroline, at her work - where being managed by a woman was difficult for one of her male staff - and also in her leisure time. She often attended women's groups, including two writing groups and we met at the London Irish Women's Centre. She left a third writing group because of its competitive atmosphere, which she attributed to the men present. The presence of lesbians at women's meetings was, however, problematic for her.

In a crisis, Caroline said her family were good for practical support and her friends for emotional support. In a recent crisis, she remarked that her non-Irish colleagues had also supported her.

Overall, Caroline mixed much more fully with Irish people in London than she had in the U.S.A. Although she was open to other cultures and peoples, her experiences in this regard were not encouraging, and so she returned to Irish networks which she enjoyed and where she felt comfortable.

#### **MARTIN**

I met Martin, a Catholic from the Republic, at the lay community of a monastery when I was on retreat during my fieldwork period. He had no links with other informants.

Martin emigrated to London in 1980, aged 17, having just finished school. This was largely at his parents' suggestion, prior to their own emigration to France. His five siblings had already left Ireland, for London, Canada, Switzerland, America and Spain. Martin chose London as the easiest option in terms of language and visa problems and because he had one brother there. Another brother had also had success in finding work in London in the past, which encouraged him.

Initially, Martin stayed at his brother's, obtaining a job as a clerical worker within a fortnight, following a recommendation from a friend of his brother. He rented a flat a week later, from an Irish landlord who was introduced to him by an English parish priest.

Martin quickly obtained qualifications in business studies and computer science and obtained several promotions, moving from being

"a sort of second to the bottom, a clerical grade in salary, to being second from the top, supervisory grade in salary within six months".

In 1985, he became a "technical support manager" for another firm and in 1987, became a technical consultant for a large computer firm in the city, doubling his salary. Again, he was promoted and in 1990 was given the responsibility for a project within Buckingham Palace.

Martin bought his own flat in 1982, but in 1985, rented it out in order to live with friends, then living in the lay community where I met him, for a year. He did this to be with "university types", having "missed out" on university himself

and in order to live with a "wider range of English people".

Martin initially saw only his brother, "briefly" and his family "occasionally", when they visited London. He turned to the Catholic church in these early days "for some stability" and "something familiar", he suggested, and an Irish priest was important to him. I asked Martin if the priest's Irishness had made a difference and he responded:

"It must have done. It didn't to me at the time because he seemed to me to be very English. He had been there for 25 or 30 years".

He joined a social club at church as

"an avenue for friends that I would have .. something in common with".

He was also befriended by an English colleague, who welcomed him into her family, and he suggested, represented a mother figure for him.

Martin reflected that his friends were "almost always English". He described this as "deliberate", saying he "avoided Irish people", demonstrating a clarity and purposefulness about this which was rare among my informants. He tended to down-play the Irish contacts he had, for example describing one second generation Irish friend as "very English" due to his English residence and networks.

Integration was important to Martin. He wished "to be completely accepted by the English" simply because it was so "difficult". He related proudly his invitations to Buckingham Palace and to shoots in Scotland; these represented for him the zenith of integration into English life. However, he was sent to Buckingham Palace partly because he was Irish, as the

firm's contact there was Irish; he also suggested that being Irish had helped him in this context, as he was less intimidated, and able to be more "outrageous" than an English person. Ironically, it also led to rejection as some middle-class people, intimidated by his connections with the "aristocracy", withdrew from him. Martin found this difficult. This particular example of integration was thus a complex one for him.

Martin had a three year relationship with an English Catholic whom he met through a church social club, and found the acceptance her "very English" family offered him rewarding. This was followed by a three month relationship with an English Protestant whom he met at the lay community, then a five year relationship with a German, Catholic woman. He considered leaving London with her, either for Germany or Ireland, as she "particularly liked Ireland", and under her influence, he developed pride in Irish literature.

Martin's time in London was thus characterised by a desire to be accepted by English people and be successful. He did not wish to replicate Ireland in any way, although he made a small number of Irish contacts. He did not, however, show a desire to assimilate, or lose his Irish identity: his acceptance in Buckingham Palace was eased by his being Irish, he maintained his accent and had much to say that was positive about Ireland.

In 1991, Martin returned to Ireland to run his own business. He felt he had "done most things that you can do" in his ten years in London. He chose Ireland because of the business

opportunity, but also noted,

"the quality of life in Ireland is one of the best in the world".

#### **ELIZABETH**

Elizabeth, a Northern Irish Protestant in her 20s, came to London in 1985. We first met in Northern Ireland, in 1988 through a mutual friend and she had no links with other informants.

Elizabeth had obtained a degree in Northern Ireland, a postgraduate degree in Great Britain, and then, responding to an advertisement in a professional journal, obtained a job in the civil service in London, where she remained.

She stayed first in a Methodist hostel recommended by a church contact at "home", then moved into a succession of flat-shares. Her first flat-share was with an English colleague whom she had met in the hostel. Elizabeth found flats through the usual channels - local papers and Lettings Agencies - but also through church noticeboards.

Elizabeth was a practising Christian. She spent her leisure time exploring a number of Protestant churches, and church networks were an important source of friends for her. Work, college, and the Methodist hostel were other sources of friends. The hostel was a very good place to make friends, she suggested, as everyone was thrown in together (and also new to London). It supplied both Christian and non-Christian friends, as although it was a Methodist hostel, religious commitment was not required.

As a result, some of Elizabeth's friends (whom I met) were Christians, including two close friends, and some were not.



She was contradictory about this, suggesting that she did not have enough Christian friends, but also that her friends "just happened to be Christians. I didn't seek them out". In saying this, she underestimated the importance of the Christian networks she chose to socialise in.

None of Elizabeth's friends were Irish. She again suggested that this was by chance: "I just didn't seem to come into contact with them". However, she did not tend to socialise in Irish venues; while once or twice she attended an Irish pub or other Irish activity because a friend wanted to try it, she did not return. Still, she visited Northern Ireland frequently, around three times a year, and her contacts there, particularly family, mattered to her.

In general, Elizabeth did not enjoy groups, although she periodically tried them in order to meet new people, including potential partners. Thus, she attended a "20+" group at her church, and an "Irish Network" activity at the prompting of a friend, but did not return. She engaged in some sporting activities, and attended university clubs occasionally, but otherwise her major activities were church ones. However, we attended a number of Irish plays together at her suggestion.

Elizabeth had a relationship which lasted under a year with a Welsh Catholic whom she met at work. Subsequently, she dated two English men, one of whom she had met through a university social club, and another encountered through a mutual friend. One of these was Protestant, and the religious affiliation of the other was not known to her, which surprised me. She told

me that her preferred boyfriend would be a Northern Irish Protestant, although post-fieldwork, this opinion had changed.

On the whole, religious networks were of more relevance to Elizabeth than ethnic ones. In her religious commitment, she was, of course, expressing something of her upbringing. Elizabeth remained very close to her family and visited home at every available opportunity. She experienced a great dilemma in deciding whether to return to Ireland to live, or stay in London. She had not succeeded in feeling settled in London, but was still reluctant to leave. This dilemma was ongoing when fieldwork ended.

#### **MARY**

Mary, a Catholic from the Republic, in her early 20s, emigrated to Essex in 1984, moving to central London in 1986. We met in 1988 at a L.I.W.C. conference. She had met some of the other women at the L.I.W.C. whom I encountered in the course of fieldwork, but, like Caroline, was not sufficiently friendly with any of my informants to arrange to meet them outside L.I.W.C. events.

Mary obtained a degree in Ireland, which included a placement in London, then applied for one job in England "which was the one I got", in the social work sphere. She told me about emigrating, "I really didn't think very closely about it" and was relieved to discover, at a L.I.W.C. workshop, that such vagueness was common. Leaving Essex, she did agency work for a year in central London, then worked in South London 1987-89 in a family centre.

Mary's job provided her first accommodation. She then

answered an advertisement for a shared house in Essex, where she lived with English people and was joined by an Asian colleague. In central London, she moved between a succession of flats, joining Irish friends, one of whom was also a colleague.

After this, she became involved in a housing co-operative. As this had an equal opportunities policy, it entailed openness to living with people from all cultures. Indeed, Mary told me she was the only Irish member, describing the other residents as "quite a mixture", namely: one-third black West Indians, one second generation Irish man, a white, Northern English woman, two East Enders, and two second generation Yugoslavians.

Mary said she found the first six months in London very difficult, describing it as "a culture shock". Her only contacts in the U.K. were an uncle in Surrey, whom she described as being of "a different generation, with different values", and a friend in Scotland. She described this as difficult and telephoned her family for support. Later, two friends joined her from Ireland which helped.

Mary reflected that "most of my close friends are Irish". Some of these she had known in Ireland and others she met through "friends of friends". She felt that Irish people were easy to befriend due to the "shared background", as

"a lot of the ground work is done already..you ..know where somebody's coming from".

When she split up with her boyfriend, she telephoned her sister in Ireland and turned to her Irish friends for support.

Mary also enjoyed Irish activities. At her suggestion, we went to Irish pubs and Irish women's gatherings. She said she "always celebrate(d) St Patrick's day" and liked to go to céilís. She also attended an Irish language class, and various groups at the L.I.W.C., including housing and video groups.

However, she also suggested that she did not wish to mix with a "totally Irish circle", but wanted to meet

"different people and..get out and about a bit".

She described visiting the worship centres of a number of different world faiths after coming to London and finding them very exciting. She had English and Asian friends, as well as multi-cultural flatmates, and her boyfriends had been West Indian and Polish. These choices stemmed from a genuine interest in other cultures as well as an ethical commitment to an equal opportunities way of life. Other, less ideological motivations were also significant. She suggested that she and her Asian colleague shared the status of being "the newer members of staff", as well as both being migrants.

Thus, Mary enjoyed mixing with Irish people in Irish venues and also enjoyed exploring other cultures. She liked going to the cinema, to clubs, including a Polish one, and to restaurants, Italian, African and other (some with me). She therefore had a number of priorities and these could change. In 1991 she remarked that she had not visited the L.I.W.C. for two years. She had also drifted out of the video group and joined a local one for its convenience.

Mary left London in 1991 to resume her studies in Manchester.

## **BREDA**

I met Breda, a Catholic from the Republic, in 1989 through a friend from Northern Ireland. She came to London in 1988, having obtained B.A. and M.A. degrees in Ireland, suggesting it was "to get my career together", although also drawing attention to how "normal" it was for Irish people to migrate.

Breda was lesbian and I wondered if this had helped prompt migration. She described a painful split with a close friend in Ireland after revealing her sexuality. She had also not "come out" to her family; this caused tension and distance on her part. London, by contrast, she described as having the biggest lesbian and gay centre in the world, and a supportive network which she valued. However, she told me that she had been determined not to emigrate because of her sexuality, as that would have been like "running away".

Breda had wanted to work in publishing, but disliked the "image" requirements, including dress code, emphasis on whom you knew and which university you had attended. Instead, she temped for a year as a secretary. She also started freelance journalism for an Irish newspaper, which led to permanent work. While she felt that joining an Irish paper was "a matter of chance", this underplayed the fact that she had directly approached two Irish papers for work. Breda was very dissatisfied with her current job, as I describe in Chapter 5, and left it to work in an Irish women's centre.

Initially, Breda stayed with an Irish friend. She suggested that where one lived was "luck" or "chance", again disclaiming

active responsibility, but was adamant that she would not choose Kilburn, seeing it as dingy, rough and dangerous. When I met her, she was living with mostly Irish women, although sleeping on the floor, and described herself as "homeless". She aspired to get a "nice place" of her own.

Breda used Irish contacts to look for accommodation, including the "Irish in Islington" project, and Irish, female friends had offered her space. However, as one of them had a child, she declined. Her brother, also in Greater London, offered to store her belongings, but she described him as living "a million miles away" as he lived far from a tube, had no telephone, and they were not emotionally close.

While she lived and worked with Irish people, Breda described this as stifling. Yet, she also socialised with Irish people and in Irish activities, attending various political, housing, writing, sporting and social events for Irish women. She was involved in a lesbian group at the L.I.W.C. and supported the Centre's conferences and other gatherings. I attended some Irish events with her, including a lesbian (Irish) musical event in a pub, a play on Grace O'Malley, an Irish pirate, and an Irish in Britain Representation Group conference. She attended some of these events in order to cover them for her newspaper.

Although clearly choosing Irish activities, venues and friends, Breda was contradictory about this. She suggested that she did not attend many Irish groups, or prefer groups because they were Irish, and said she had avoided Irish people when she first arrived, valuing instead the "variety" of

"ideas" and "cultures" in London. Yet Breda also recognised that these aspirations were not realised. Living and working with Irish people only, she lamented that she might as well still be in Ireland.

Like other informants, Breda suggested that her choice of friends was not conscious or deliberate. Rather, Irish people were friendlier and more open, whereas English people were cold, reserved and class-centred, and as a result of this, "Irish" friendships developed naturally.

Despite this and other derogations of responsibility, Breda's Irish networks were carefully judged; not all Irish contacts were of value to her but she pursued actively those that were. I suggest that her dissatisfaction was with a particular kind of Irish milieu, namely male, middle-aged and middle-class. (See Chapter 7.) She also felt alienated from the graduate Irish scene and avoided "yuppie" Irish pubs. However, she was drawn to Irish women's events where she felt much more at ease, and described the "Irish women's network" as "supportive" and "friendly". She also valued her close female friends, who were Irish.

My contact with Breda ended sharply after a conversation we had in which she was reminded of my research interest. She had apparently forgotten this and became disturbed by the reminder. After a short break, I telephoned her and although she was friendly, she no longer wanted to meet.

#### **DEIRDRE**

Deirdre taught Irish language classes in Kilburn, which I attended in 1989. She was Catholic, in her early 20s and had

emigrated in 1987 from the Republic.

Her classes were informally run, mostly consisting of continual talk in Irish. During breaks, she and the students chatted (in English) about various issues concerned with being Irish in London: our histories, our experiences of the English, returning to Ireland, other Irish migrants, attitudes to speaking Irish. One student told a humorous story which he represented as "typical of the Irish": an Irish man had asked him for money; when he answered in Irish, the man responded "bloody foreigners, talking in strange languages". What was considered "typical" about this was the extent to which Irish people were alienated from their own language.

Attendees were mostly first generation Irish Catholics, but two Protestants (including me) and two English people also came. The class was held in a Kilburn school, and although it failed to reach the requisite minimum numbers, it was allowed to run as Irish was considered a "minority" language. These classes were less social than the Irish Studies classes I attended, (see Chapter 6) due, partly at least, to their location. The school provided quite a formal setting and no more informal location readily offered itself for us to move on to after the class. Furthermore, class members did not gel as a group in the way that I experienced the Irish Studies group to do.

Deirdre had a degree in Irish, from the Republic and had taught for a year in Ireland. She described her emigration as "forced", but as I explained in Chapter 4, it was more complex than this. Three of her siblings had also emigrated, to



America, France and London.

When I met Deirdre, she was staying in a teachers' hostel. It was known as an Irish hostel, she said, although other nationalities stayed there too. She enjoyed it, as it helped her to meet people, which she found difficult in London. Later, she stayed with her brother, whom she had not mentioned before. She was not particularly happy about this arrangement.

Deirdre worked as a temporary teacher in a multi-cultural primary school, but had refused a permanent contract, uncertain whether she wished to remain in London. She told me she "hated" teaching, felt she was "on show for 9 hours" a day, unable to be herself. This "wears your spirit away", she told me. By contrast, she loved teaching Irish and said that it gave her "a buzz". She was therefore considering doing this instead of primary school teaching.

At primary school, Deirdre was keen to promote Irish culture. She described having awakened her pupils' imagination to Irish culture as "the one thing I feel good about in the school year". She also tried to encourage a Northern Irish teacher, who shunned Irish activities, to feel more positive about these. She attributed the woman's attitude to her Northern origins and "the Troubles". Eventually, her colleague revealed that her daughter was interested in Irish dancing, and Deirdre helped locate classes for her, suggesting that Irish dancing was "as valid as any other kind".

Twice, Deirdre came to an Irish Studies class I attended, although she was not formally registered; she socialised

afterwards with the students (and me). These classes (like Irish language classes) gave her "a buzz". (I felt rather like this, finding that I went along to "do research", and left feeling unexpectedly affirmed and proud to be Irish.) Deirdre expressed regret that she was unable to attend more Irish Studies classes. However, her "Emigrants' Voice" meetings took up too much time. I observed that she was very familiar with Aras na nGael, where the classes were held, and was known by the bar staff.

Deirdre had not always valued Irish language and culture, having previously felt that doing so was "Victorian"; she stiffened and held herself primly to illustrate what she meant. She had been ashamed to read Irish books, buy the "Irish Post" and admit to going to dancing classes in London, but had realised that this was accepting the negative view of Irishness imposed by the English, and meant "repressing yourself". Later, she became politically active in Irish in Britain issues as I describe in Chapter 10.

She described London as a "cold" place, saying she was lonely and did not fit in. She also felt "constantly undermined" by anti-Irish prejudice. Sometimes, she told me,

"I long to talk to my family or someone from home who really understands me".

Deirdre described Aras na nGael as a "Godsend" for Irish people to meet others:

"if all the Irish people in London could get in touch, it would be brilliant",

she said,

"no-one need be lonely again".

A major part of its value for her was thus how it provided contact with other Irish people.

Deirdre was very uncertain whether she would remain in London, and this was a central preoccupation. On one occasion, she said her main aim was to return to college; I suggested an Irish Studies course which had just been discussed in our Irish Studies class, and she said despondently, "but that would mean staying here..." However, returning to Ireland had disadvantages as she would be inclined to "stick there", as "that's the way it is there", whereas her aspiration was to travel. She also described Ireland as "dead", with "no young people".

Her decision partly hinged on whether she remained in her relationship with her boyfriend. This had lasted for a year, but she was thinking of ending it, as she felt her boyfriend did not treat her "well enough". Deirdre had "neglected" to make friends while with her boyfriend and regretted this. Thus, she did not feel sufficiently "at home" in London to remain if it ended and did not feel like starting over again to find accommodation, a new job and friends. Also, if she stayed, she would be starting her third year in London which, she suggested, meant that she would be "here for the next 20 years". This statement, made in the Irish class, was received with compassionate recognition.

Deirdre's networks were Irish, but she was very positive about alternative cultures and enjoyed meeting people of other nationalities. She did not, like Breda, lament how many of her contacts were Irish, given her aspirations to multi-

culturalism, but rather, wished to increase her Irish friends. She was uncertain, however, whether it was worth staying on in London in order to do this, or whether she should "cut her losses" and leave.

**PAUL**

Paul, a Protestant from Northern Ireland in his early 20s, was known to me through a friend and I had met him often in Northern Ireland before he migrated to London, in 1988.

He emigrated to get a job more in keeping with his qualifications in electronics, because his friends were already in London, and to get away from "the Troubles", especially relevant because his girlfriend was Catholic. He said it was "nice to get away from it all" and felt a lot happier in London, describing the atmosphere as "a lot more relaxed".

Paul initially stayed with his Northern Irish friends, Hugh, David and Richard, also informants known to me from N. Ireland. He described the initial weeks as difficult, as his friends were working and he was not. However, after two weeks, he obtained plumbing work through a contact from his home town and moved in with his boss. He regarded this as very "lucky" although it was not work he wished to remain in. Within two months he had obtained work as a telecommunications engineer, and after this, found accommodation with Hugh. He described finding accommodation in London as difficult due to the demand for places and the fact that property owners did not "take you at your word", but wanted references. Paul's girlfriend joined him after a year, and Hugh moved out.

Paul initially socialised with his Northern Irish, Protestant friends. He greatly valued having had them to join initially, as without this, he felt that it would have been harder to meet anyone. I socialised with this group and observed that as well as the core of Northern Irish Protestants known to each other pre-migration, there were other Irish people present, from North and Republic, Catholic and Protestant, and Scottish people. These were people his Northern Irish friends had met prior to Paul's arrival and also colleagues of Paul's.

This group socialised in Kilburn and in Catholic Irish venues, which represented a change for Paul and his Protestant friends. Paul remarked on the absence of a strong Northern Irish community, differentiating this from the "Southern Irish" experience. He noted that Irish pubs were a "tight community" where there could be tension if you were unknown, and described a "dangerous" incident where one of their group had drunkenly sung "The Sash", an Orange Protestant song. However, he suggested that Irish venues were safe as long as one avoided troublemakers. (See Chapter 5.) Despite such clear favouring of Irish locations and the considerable extent to which Paul kept Irish company, he tended to play down the amount he socialised with Irish people.

In terms of unknown Irish migrants, Paul expressed distaste for Northern Irish people who expected an "immediate friendship" or "favours" due to shared nationality. However, he did enjoy more casual friendliness from compatriots, discussing shared origins.

In addition to the above, Paul also socialised in pubs with his new, mainly non-Irish colleagues at weekends, and his company held monthly social events which included partners. He identified his Northern Irish contacts and his work place as the two main centres of his relationship networks. His Scottish boss and he became "close mates", as both were unmarried, liked to drink together, and initially this man was one of the few people to understand Paul's accent. Paul felt that London's social scene revolved around work, and that his own work-place was particularly valuable in this respect.

Paul's attitudes changed in London as previously he had "grave trepidation" about English people, yet in London, found them "really, easy to get on with, **much** easier than Northern Irish people", due to the absence of sectarianism and the open-mindedness he encountered. He described himself wryly as becoming "liberal" because he now socialised with black colleagues, as well as his new English and Scottish friends. In addition, there were "quite a lot of Southern Irish people" in his office. He suggested that the socialising with non-Irish people which occurred through his workplace "just happened" because London was cosmopolitan, and he was not prejudiced (although he was initially prejudiced about a number of groups). He had also changed in that he celebrated St. Patrick's Day in London, not the case in Northern Ireland.

Paul got married in London, where the stigma of a "mixed marriage" was reduced. I attended the wedding. The guests included family and friends from Northern Ireland, and

Scottish and Irish friends made in London. Being Irish in London was discussed at the reception and a self-deprecating attitude shown, again reminiscent of Herzfeld's (1997) concept of "cultural intimacy": Irish jokes were told, and English staff at the hotel were presented as "panicking" about an Irish wedding. "The worst thing is", one woman said, "we will probably live up to all the stereotypes".

Paul's socialising habits changed after Alison's arrival. He stopped going to clubs with his Northern Irish friends, and tended to go alone with Alison or not at all. Socialising with colleagues was also reduced, as Alison would join him and they would leave after "an hour".

Paul and Alison moved to the Republic in 1991, where Alison's family had a flat. Paul had been made redundant and they were being evicted. They also wanted to buy a house, and could not afford London prices. In addition to this, greater proximity to family and the prospect of starting their own family were further factors, although these were of less interest to Paul than to Alison.

Paul said he never wanted to return to Northern Ireland. The Republic offered a way of being in Ireland which distanced him from "the Troubles" and from being too close to his family, and moving to a city where he was unknown would help counteract the claustrophobia he had experienced before. He said that he had "really enjoyed" London, but was looking forward to his next move, as Alison would be with him.

#### **ALISON**

I met Alison, a Northern Irish Catholic in her early 20s,

through Paul. She emigrated in 1989 to join him. Although Alison was guarded with me, she nonetheless provided much valuable information, and I therefore include her as a core informant.

Alison migrated later than Paul in order to complete her training as a complementary health professional. She obtained a job in London before moving, telling me she emigrated because she could not get work experience in Northern Ireland. I suspect that her desire to join Paul, which she also stated, was much more compelling, as she moved immediately her course ended.

Alison moved in with Paul, but they found a flat she preferred within a month. Like Paul, she described finding accommodation in London as difficult, as personal contacts were replaced by formal interviews and references. Within a month of migrating, Alison married Paul.

Having visited Paul often prior to migration, Alison said London was what she expected. Still, she was "lonely" and missed her family more than expected. In Northern Ireland, she visited them every week-end. She described Paul's experience as easier than hers, as he had friends already living in London, unlike her. This discounted her own relationship with his friends, but in Northern Ireland, I had heard that she did not approve of them.

Alison said she mostly socialised with Paul and they did not mix with Irish people. This was not deliberate, but simply because she and Paul

"never went to the places to come in contact with them..on a regular basis".



This conflicted with Paul's stories, my observations of his social life and her own references to joining Paul's friends in pubs. Obviously, these were not contacts she valued and perhaps she described the situation she would like to see, rather than what actually happened.

Alison said she did not wish to be "clannish" by mixing only with Irish people, but wanted to be open to everyone she met. She also wished to treat everyone "the same" at work, whether Irish or non-Irish. She had, however, encountered patients who expected better treatment due to their shared ethnicity. One client expected to be seen despite arriving an hour late, saying "I'm from the same country as you". Alison refused to treat her, applying the same rule to all her clients. She displayed the same attitude to her colleagues, describing this as necessary for her job, and told me,

"You just can't not be nice to people you know..there's no point in building barriers";

she reflected, on a practical note, that doing so would mean "you're not going to get any help".

This aspiration to openness led to Alison underplaying the Irish people in her milieu. Thus she did not identify that four of the colleagues in her small organisation were Irish, two Northern Irish, including her boss until I asked directly about this. She also identified a friend as someone she had trained with, rather than as Northern Irish. Indeed, she tended to identify social contacts by meeting place rather than by ethnicity.

Alison had, however, encountered anti-Irish prejudice from clients who portrayed Irish people as stupid, and corrected

her way of speaking. She found the latter particularly annoying, saying that everyone had the right to speak in their own way, but on the whole, did not emphasize prejudice.

Work had not provided friendships for Alison. She said this was because she worked alone, doing home visits. However, she had visited several colleagues' homes, but did not count this as "socialising", seeing it as something that went on in external venues. Alison attended Catholic church in London periodically, but did not use this as an avenue for meeting friends.

On the whole, Alison's networks were through Paul, a situation she did not find entirely satisfactory. She did not wish to select friends because they were Irish, nor indeed because they were non-Irish, but on non-ethnic grounds. In practice, she socialised in Irish venues with Paul and his Irish friends, but also with his ethnically mixed colleagues. Apart from this, she did not go out very much.

Alison said she wished to return to Ireland because of Paul: it was more difficult for him to be unemployed than her, and she did not mind giving up her job in order to increase his chances of finding employment by moving to the Republic. She presented no evidence that job opportunities were better there and I suggest that non-economic motives were more significant. Her desire to have a family was important to Alison. She did not want to bring up children in London, as she felt they would not be able to have a "normal" life. She would have to work full-time as a mother in London to make ends meet, and buying a house was expensive here. She also wanted a family

member or personal contact rather than a stranger to look after her child. In addition, she had not established independent networks in London which would have encouraged her to stay.

Alison, like Paul, did not want to return to Northern Ireland. Although she greatly valued her family, she had grown to enjoy greater privacy in London, and did not want the same degree of closeness that she had before. She had found it frustrating being repeatedly identified as her father's daughter in her home town and wanted to avoid this. She also emphasized economic considerations again, suggesting there were "no jobs". "Hopefully", she said, "there's better times ahead".

#### **ANDREW**

I met Andrew, a Northern Irish Protestant in his late 20s, in 1990 through my English flatmate. They were both classical musicians. He emigrated in 1980 to attend musical college, and he described himself to my flatmate as an "oddball", "not your average bigoted Protestant Unionist", thinking this would deter me from meeting him. He was, however, happy to meet me once he had made this position clear.

Andrew's parents were from the Republic (where his grandfather remained) and he had lived in Southern England until he was four, then in Dublin for a year and then in Northern Ireland until he was 18. He referred to Northern Ireland as "home", but said he did not fit in there, often being told that he sounded English or Southern Irish. His first friends as a child tended to have Scottish or Welsh parents; he reflected that this was "not an accident".

Andrew came to London solely to study, then obtained work and moved to Greater London. He continued to teach in central London twice weekly. He had emigrated with the aspiration of being recognised as a "successful musician", an aim he felt he had fulfilled. Now, he valued being a "good" musician rather than a recognised one, and would be more content to perform well in a "backwater" in Northern Ireland, he suggested.

Andrew mixed in musical circles predominantly and did not have any Irish friends when I met him. He expressed surprise at this. However, he was also definite that he tended to avoid rather than "gravitate" to Irish people. He did not like being introduced to other Irish migrants as people he would have something in common with, as once origins were discussed, in his view, there was nothing else to say.

He described the few Irish people who were at his college as "quiet", which he felt was a feature of Irish people, who tended to be painfully shy and introverted; this made them harder to get to know. (This is quite different from other informants' views of the ease of making friendships with Irish people because of their friendliness.) He referred to one Irish person as typically aggressive and unpleasant, another negative image. He felt "embarrassed" and "ashamed" of this person. Andrew also said that one had to be careful around English people as they were easily offended. He found it difficult to make friends generally, although this had eased with age.

Andrew felt that being Irish in the "cut-throat" musical world was advantageous, as he could "get away with more" and was

remembered easily. However, it surprised him when people asked where he was from, as he tended to forget such issues while absorbed in music.

In 1988, Andrew married an English woman whom he had met in musical circles. They considered moving to Scotland "eventually", due to the beauty of the country and because they had musical friends there they could play with. He also suggested that Scotland was the ideal place to be a Protestant Celt, as the Scots were Celts without the sectarian bigotry. He told me he would not want to live in Northern Ireland or bring up children there because of the sectarianism, nor in the Republic, due to the Church's control over issues like divorce and contraception.

However, he visited Northern Ireland twice a year to perform in an orchestra. I asked him if he returned to work, or worked there to enable him to return (with expenses paid) and he said it was a mixture of both. He had thus taken advantage of his musical skills to obtain regular, if infrequent work in Northern Ireland.

I asked Andrew if he played Irish music. He said he did not, as it had not been passed down in his family and his was a classical training. However, he had a tin whistle, he admitted with a smile, and enjoyed listening to Irish folk music. He differentiated Protestant Irish folk music, with its Scottish influences.

Andrew told me he did not want to "parade" his Irishness through seeking out Irish people, or reading Irish papers, and expressed distaste for people who did. He did not mix with

Irish people or in Irish venues at all, and knew no other informants of mine. He did, however, emphasize his Irishness a great deal in other ways. He liked Irish writers, naming one who had dealt with the issue of being English in Ireland and Irish in England. This was a dilemma Andrew shared, feeling he did not fit in either place. Secondly, he had considered re-starting Irish dancing, having enjoyed it as a child, but been forced to stop because of peer pressure. He also enjoyed Irish sport, but boycotted it because of the "narrowness" of the G.A.A., which prevented its members from watching English sport. Lastly, he named documentaries he had watched on Northern Ireland and was interested in my views.

#### **STEPHEN**

Stephen, a Catholic from the Republic, was in his late 30s when we met in 1990 at a British Association for Irish Studies fundraising dinner. He was married to a Catholic from the Republic.

Stephen worked in America for a few years, then returned to Ireland, briefly, and thence to London in 1984, with the same firm who had first interviewed him. His decision to emigrate was somewhat haphazard, as I describe in Chapter 4. His wife returned to Ireland temporarily to give birth to their first child, as he had wanted her to be born in Ireland. During this time, he worked in London during the week and commuted "home" most week-ends. Stephen worked in different locations in London and Antwerp for some months, then set up his own company. He was its only employee and described its formation as a tax dodge. He worked as a computer compiler and succeeded

in building up long-term contracts which gave him more security.

Stephen lived in an area with a significant Irish presence and we drank in his local Irish pub together. He was positive about the thriving Irish "community" he perceived around him. (see Chapter 5). Nonetheless, it was with surprise that Stephen acknowledged that his companions were mostly Irish. His Irish networks were established in the area where he lived and also, through his membership of the "London Irish" Rugby Club. Here, he socialised with Protestants and Catholics, finding this was easier to do in London. Back in Ireland, his friendships with Protestants would not survive, he felt, whereas "take any two Irish men and they would get on well here". However, despite stating this, he also disliked certain Irish people, who were loud and drunken and whom he described as "stage Irish".

He told me he had visited "home" six times last year, each time for a specific reason; he mentioned a rugby international, a wedding and Christmas as examples. As his wife worked for an airline company, they could fly for £20 each and took full advantage of it.

Stephen worked with English people and his other hobby, sailing, also attracted English people. He suggested that he wished to sail more and aspired to buy a bigger boat so that his family could join him for week-ends. He said he enjoyed the "interaction" between Irish and English people (see Chapter 5), but also referred to incidences of anti-Irish prejudice and was irritated by the British media's treatment

of the Irish.

Stephen described himself as "settled", but also as a traveller, someone who loved the idea of uprooting and moving on. He said leaving London "wouldn't cost me a thought". However, his wife was less keen and he did not want to disrupt his child. He considered moving to Europe, as the computer language used there was English. He also liked the idea of returning to Ireland, and of bringing up his child there. However, he feared that it would be difficult to reduce his standard of living, as salaries were so much lower, and thought he might retire to Ireland instead.

#### **TONY**

I met Tony, a Catholic from the Republic in his early 20s, in 1990 through a friend of a friend in Northern Ireland. He had no contact with my other informants.

Tony emigrated in 1988 to study Osteopathy. He chose London, he said, as his grades were too low for Dublin, but his reasons were actually more complex (see Chapter 4). His plan was to qualify as an osteopath, like his sister, and return to Ireland to set up his own business. However, he was unhappy at college and left after twelve months. He wanted to go to Australia for a year and visit friends, but was persuaded by his parents to start Business Studies at another college instead. When I met him he was working on a building site in the summer holidays; he had one year left of his course.

Tony told me of one other Irish person at his first college, who had lost his accent after three years in England and was



therefore "not noticeable". He, by contrast, was teased about his accent and endlessly made to feel different, which he found irritating. These negative experiences prompted his departure. He felt uncomfortable in other settings about his Irishness too, expecting people to "say something" after bombings, although they rarely did. He also described himself as "afraid to open my mouth" at the building site as he was the only Irish person there. Tony told me that "being Irish comes up every day", with English people recognising his accent, or Irish people asking him where he was from, or the media focusing on I.R.A. bombings. On his new course, there were more Irish people and he felt much more comfortable with this.

Tony had relations in London. He saw his uncle and sister every month and his mother fortnightly. He also saw another brother in Surrey periodically and had two brothers who were likely to follow him to London. He thus had a significant family support structure in London. In addition, he visited Ireland at Easter and Christmas and "a week now and then during the year", to see his friends and father.

Tony was living with a Greek Cypriot girlfriend over the summer but indicated that this was a short-term arrangement as she was returning to Cyprus. He liked her differences from him and enjoyed introducing her to Ireland's beauty, through pictures of his home, and explaining ways in which it differed from England. He took her to a céilí, as a "one-off", but this turned out to be a festival of various cultures, not just Irish.

Tony said his dream was to return to Dublin, marry, bring up children there, and be a businessman for a local firm. He thought the schooling system was better in Ireland and that one had more chance of realising ambitions there because of its smaller size. He also thought it was simply a "nice" place to live. If he met an English woman, he might settle in England, he conceded. He would not, however, live in Northern Ireland because of "the Troubles" and the fact that he had no family there. In the short term, he wanted to get work experience in London and to spend a year working in Australia. He would not want to remain in Australia, as he had no family there and it was too far from "home".

Tony had lived with English flatmates. Most of his friends were, however, Irish. This was not because he sought them out, he said, but it just happened that way: they were more friendly and open, had things in common, and sometimes knew mutual contacts in Ireland.

Tony did not frequent Irish bars or attend Irish groups. He distinguished between bars in terms of age group, as I explain in Chapter 5. However, he did like to go to Irish bands. This was more fun with a group of Irish people, he said, than alone or with his girlfriend. He told me with enthusiasm that he bought the "Irish Times", but then conceded that he would not go out of his way to do so, and that English papers were more usual.

Tony enjoyed Irish friendships and seemed to feel most comfortable with young Irish people like himself. However, he did not wish to socialise in Irish venues, or encounter only

Irish people, and was open to English and other cultures.

Overall, my informants had varying backgrounds and attitudes to these backgrounds, and also varying responses to their new lives in London. They each had different levels of support in London and chose to remain in touch with other Irish people to very different extents. Those who did not have Irish friends or contacts did, however, emphasize their Irish heritage in alternative ways, stressed throughout the thesis.

### APPENDIX 3

#### UNEMPLOYMENT RATES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Unemployment is high in Northern Ireland and the way in which this is divided by gender and religion is shown below.

#### Protestant and Catholic unemployment rates 1971-81

	1971		1981	
	Protestant %	Catholic %	Protestant %	Catholic %
Males	6.6	17.3	12.0	30.0
Females	2.4	4.9	10.0	17.0

(O'Dowd 1986:210-216)

**APPENDIX 4**

**DEATHS IN NORTHERN IRELAND DUE TO "THE TROUBLES" 1989 (1988)**

Status of Victim	Agency of Death					Total	% of all deaths
	Sec forces	Rep para	Loy para	Unknown/ oth			
Security forces (42.6)	2 (0)	22 (39)	0 (1)	0 (0)	24 (40)	39.3	
Republican paramilitaries (10.6)	0 (5)	1 (3)	1 (2)	0 (0)	2 (10)	3.3	
Loyalist paramilitaries (3.2)	1 (0)	0 (2)	0 (1)	0 (0)	1 (3)	1.6	
Civilian: All: (42.6)	1 (2)	15 (20)	18 (18)	0 (0)	34 (40)	55.7	
Cath: (26.6)	1 (1)	5 (8)	16 (16)	0 (0)	22 (25)	36.1	
Prot: (13.8)	0 (1)	9 (11)	2 (1)	0 (0)	11 (13)	18.0	
Not known/ relevant (2.1)	0 (0)	1 (1)	0 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1.6	
Prison Officers (1.1)	0 (0)	0 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (1)	0	
Total (100)	4 (7)	38 (65)	19 (22)	0 (0)	61 (94)	100	

**Killings by this agency as % of all deaths**

6.6	62.3	31.1	0	100
(7.4)	(69.1)	(23.4)	(0)	(100)

**Killings by this agency as % of civilian deaths**

2.9	44.1	52.9	0	100
(4.9)	(51.2)	(43.9)	(0.0)	(100)

**Civilian deaths as % of deaths by this agent**

25.0	39.5	94.7	0	55.7
(28.6)	(32.3)	(81.8)	(0)	(43.6)

Civilian = all non-security force, non-paramilitary fatalities. It includes unclassified victims, former members of the security forces, political activists and political representatives. Prison officers are shown separately but counted as civilians in all calculations involving civilian deaths. (Fortnight February 1990:7)

## APPENDIX 5

### PARTITION IN IRELAND: BEFORE AND AFTER<sup>1</sup>

Following the plantations, in 1800, Ireland was made an integral part of the United Kingdom in the Act of Union. In the 1880s, a lively Home Rule developed and in 1919, the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) was founded, leading to the Anglo-Irish war of independence, 1919-21. The 'planters', that is, Scottish and English, Protestant landlords, continued to identify with England and the Union and thus became known as "Unionists". Their aims were to avoid religious and cultural domination in a Catholic Ireland and to continue free trade with Britain, as this was economically advantageous. Irish nationalism, by contrast, was rooted in a predominantly agricultural context, providing another source of difference.

The success of the Irish in the war of independence led to the Government of Ireland Act in 1920, followed by the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, which formally established partition. Ireland was divided into 26 counties, known as "the Free State" (renamed "The Republic of Ireland" in 1948), which had their own government, Dáil Éireann, in Dublin, and six counties in the North East, known as "Northern Ireland". This continued as part of Britain, but with its own, devolved government, which was established at Stormont after 1932. Partition meant that religious and political divisions were given a politico-geographic reality, which only served to reinforce them.

The percentage of Catholics in the 26 counties was 92.6%

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<sup>1</sup> Lyons 1985; Pringle 1989.

immediately after partition, producing a high degree of homogeneity. Probably as a result of the considerable religious repression Catholics had experienced since the plantations and the intense pressure they had been under to convert, the independent state became proudly Catholic. Catholic values were embraced in the dominant ideology and legislation on issues such as divorce, contraception and abortion, reflected this. While Protestants were not actively discriminated against, the Catholic majority did create the state in its own image. This contrasted strongly with Northern Ireland, where Protestants represented a two-thirds majority of the population. The decline of Protestantism in the Republic from an already tiny 7.5% in 1926 to 3.4% in 1981, through inter-marriage and out-migration, also served to fuel Protestant fears.

## APPENDIX 6

### GENDER ROLES IN IRELAND: EDUCATION AND WORK

**Labour force participation of women and men aged 15+ according to marital status in 1983:**

	Men %	Women %
Single	68.5	56.3
Married	83.6	19.6
Separated	79.9	40.9
Widowed	27.5	10.8
Total	75.3	31.5

(Central Statistics Office, Labour Force Survey 1983, Dublin 1984.)

**Distribution of all female employees among the main industrial sectors, with male figures in brackets:**

	1952 %	1971 %	1983 %
Manufacturing	55 (39)	35 (37)	16 (27)
Services	44 (40)	63 (45)	82 (61)
Agriculture/Construction	1 (21)	2 (18)	2 (12)

(O'Dowd, L. 1986:210-216) Although girls leave school better educated than boys, (McCarthy 1978:105-6) and have risen in third level education from one in three university students in 1968, to 1 in 2, in 1992, (Jackson 1986:297-298) the subjects chosen by them reflect stereotypes of appropriate areas for male and female: 94% of those studying home economics at leaving certificate level are girls, whereas 74% of those studying higher maths and 86% studying physics are boys. (Ibid:297-298)

After leaving school, women's attainment of high status jobs is much less than men's: although women outnumber men as national school teachers by three to one in the Republic, men are five times more likely to be school principals. Furthermore, only 1% of professorships are secured by women, 6% of associate professor and 7% of senior lecturer posts.



(Ibid:299) Only 4.83% of top management jobs are held by women and very few women are found in executive and senior positions. In Northern Ireland, high status jobs in finance and industry tend to be held by male Protestants, and lower status jobs in social services, by Catholic females. (Miller 1986:224)

Furthermore, women tend to be employees rather than employers: they accounted for 46% of all employees in 1981 and only 10% of the self-employed. Earnings also differ. Women earn 68% of male hourly earnings in 1981, with the gap widening during the 1980s. Shannon (1992:21) notes that average female earnings in the Republic in 1992 continue to be only 65% of the male average.

Even numbers of women working are strikingly less than men, due in part to the marriage bar. Despite its removal, Daly, writing in 1978, suggested that women still formed a mere 26% of the Republic's labour force, the same figure as 50 years ago, and one lower than any developed country. (1978:71-2) In 1984, there were still only 31% of women of working age in the labour market, compared to 75% of men and in 1981, married women still formed only 17.4% of the labour force. (Courtney 1986:33) Women dominate the part-time market, contributing 71% of the workers here.

In Northern Ireland, women fare somewhat better, rising from 36% of all employees in 1952, to 46% in 1983. (O'Dowd 1986:210) Married women are also around twice as likely to be in paid employment than in the Republic, due to the absence of a marriage bar. While increasing numbers of women are

entering the labour force, for this rate to match the rest of Europe, 100,000 more women would need to join employment in Ireland. (Jackson 1986:295-303)

## APPENDIX 7

### INDUSTRIALISATION IN IRELAND

Industrialisation and urbanisation has happened unequally in North and South. Traditionally, the North, in particular the North East, was the industrialised region, being the locus of the linen and shipbuilding industries. The Republic was heavily agricultural, with 67.7% of the population living in rural areas or small towns in 1926. A high percentage of the rural population were small property owners, following the land reforms in the late 19th century, which had assisted tenants to buy farms. The Republic in 1926 could thus be characterised as under-industrialised, rural and property owning.

However, this has changed dramatically. The Republic has now overtaken Northern Ireland as a manufacturing employer. Northern Ireland lost almost half of its manufacturing labour force between 1961 and 1985, whereas the Republic showed a gain of 18% during this period. By 1985, in a clear role reversal, two-thirds of Ireland's manufacturing employment lay within the Republic, compared to the 10% which it held at partition. (Brunt 1989:206)

APPENDIX 8

SOME OCCUPATIONS OF INFORMANTS

Statistician  
**Lecturer/Academic**  
**Social Worker**  
Sales Executive  
Self-employed Business person  
Fax Engineer  
Chiropodist  
Librarian  
**Student**  
Musician  
**Journalist**  
**Clerical worker**  
**Secretary**  
Civil Servant  
Recruitment Agency worker  
Plumber  
**Nurse**  
News Information worker at T.V. station  
Computer Programmer  
Electrician  
Accountant  
Town Planner  
**Irish Women's Centre workers**  
**Irish Centre workers**  
Travel Agency Representative  
Diplomat  
Priest  
Pub owner

This is not an exhaustive list, as I did not discover the occupations of all informants.  
The occupations in bold were held by more than one person.

## APPENDIX 9

### A CASE STUDY IN INTEGRATION: CAROLINE

I have chosen this case study in order to illustrate some of the complexities of integration. We see here that Caroline demonstrated a preference for partial integration; she assessed the culture and norms of English society and selected those elements with which she could identify and rejected those she disliked. Her story also shows the importance of others' reactions in limiting what is possible, and the centrality of class in this question.

When I asked Caroline about integrating, instead of discussing Irish people integrating into British society, she responded by suggesting that the English were not good at integrating with the immigrant peoples in London.

When I asked her what she meant by the word "integrate", she answered that to integrate you have to have "a sense of belonging", which entails identifying with "the ideals in the culture". She spoke of her experience in America and how she fundamentally disagreed with some American ideals, such as being a success, becoming famous or rich. These could not, she said, ever be her ideals.

"The big ideal" in England, she continued, might be pride in England, and in being a success for England; it was less "individualistic" than in the U.S., she felt. In London, she suggested, there were certain social events that people liked to attend, such as the Proms in London. "I would be quite willing to be integrated into that, you know", she explained,

"or if everybody's going to get excited about England playing in the World Cup or something, I could quite

understand that... that's their thing",  
but, she continued, she could not consider integrating into the English sense of humour, which she considered "dry" and "boring". Again, she declared that she would feel a "fraud" if she changed her accent in order to fit in, but felt that she would be prepared to compromise on "the .. emphasis on orderliness and politeness" as "the price you have to pay".

I asked Caroline if she had planned to integrate before she came to England and she responded,

"Yes. I would have quite liked to integrate because you.. have the feeling no matter what country you go to.. you always hope the place you're going to is going to turn out to be wonderful and beautiful.. and then you find maybe that the things that are there, you cannot integrate with them because they're in great conflict to what you've been brought up with".

In this event, she felt that one would have to "compromise" or else live in isolation from the other inhabitants. However, while some ideals could be difficult, others might compensate. So, in America, the success ideal she found difficult, but her liking for the openness of Americans helped to "alleviate" this.

Caroline felt that the class system was central in England, and that integration depended on "being accepted by the English". Due to this class system, she felt that one would have to lose one's accent to be properly accepted.

"They don't like people with Irish accents - you get that feeling",

she continued. This could lead to being "automatically excluded" by some people which she found "devastating really":

"immediately you open your mouth, you know, some people

are making a social judgement about, well, she won't do". Referring to working-class society, Caroline felt that it was impossible to fit in here either as she did not behave as they expected an "upper-class person" to behave, and yet was clearly not what she described as "lower-class". She felt that working-class people rejected her too because she did not behave "properly". The class system resulted, in her view, in people being "straitjacketed" into a particular class, which she disapproved of, and she concluded, "I can't abide this class system".

English society was, in fact, a disappointment to Caroline; she had been attracted to the idea of a multi-cultural society, yet discovered when she arrived that it was not as she expected:

"I never realised how little integrated they<sup>1</sup> were with the rest of English society, that none of their friends were English".

In America, she had mixed more with Americans, but in England "it didn't work out like that", as she tended to have more Irish friends or people with Irish connections. Having felt that she had not on the whole successfully integrated in London, and that it would take "several generations" to effect this, Caroline chose to return to Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> That is, immigrants.

<sup>2</sup> This contrasts with Martin's experience. He chose to return because he felt he had integrated fully; in his mind this was indicated in particular by having become acquainted with Royalty, gone shooting on an estate in Scotland, and been fully accepted by a previous girlfriend's distinguished English family. What else is there for an Irish person to do?, he enquired. For him too, however, the class system in England was integral to the success of integration.

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