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The advent of the 'Celtic Tiger' saw Ireland transform from a country with high levels of emigration to one of significant immigration. Many of those who migrated to Ireland in the past years are 'returned migrants'; people who left Ireland, often to work in the UK, and have now returned 'home'. In many cases they have brought their foreign-born children 'home' with them, and these 'children' are the focus of this study. This paper examines the impact that accent may have on feelings of belonging of the children of returned migrants from England to Ireland. The qualitative approach in this research is based on interviews with five participants; all of whom moved to Ireland, from England, at the age of ten years or older and are now adults. The research explores the ways in which accent has worked to either help them belong, or mark them as 'outsiders'; and the findings and conclusions are drawn using a range of theoretical frameworks, such as theories around ethnicity, migration, diaspora, social and cultural capital, and social identity.

Introduction

The migrations of people across the globe have led to diasporas[1]; where people have brought their customs and languages away from their homelands and formed ethnic communities abroad. The relationships that these migrants have with the indigenous population can form the basis of ethnic identity making situations (Fenton 1999, pp.29-31). For people who find themselves in an 'ethnic minority', or as 'outsiders' to the majority, it can be difficult to feel a

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[1] 'Diaspora' is a concept which refers to a connection between groups who are located across different nation states and whose commonality lies in an original, different homeland. This leads to the construction of a new identity; one which is on a world-wide scale and transcends national borders (Anthias 1999, p.2).

sense of belonging. Cohen (1985 cited in Jenkins 2008b, p.136) explains that the ideological notion of community is both inclusive and exclusive; it says how things should be, not just how they are. Those that do not understand or share the same 'sense of things' such as devotion to the local rugby team, for example, will find it difficult to experience a sense of belonging within that community.

Language, and accent in particular, are crucial forms of ethnic boundary markers. Surface pointers such as language and dress are used so that groups can easily identify each other and distinguish themselves from others (Nash 1996, pp.24-25). Accent is a clear and easily recognisable surface pointer. It can instantly mark a person out as either belonging or not, being one of 'us' or 'them'. The central aim of this research, therefore, is to understand the impact that accent may have on the children of returned migrants.

Hybrid ethnicities

The concept of hybridity is linked to the notions of globalization and diaspora. Ethnic identity is no longer seen as something static; in today's globalized world it is possible for ethnicities to meet and merge (Anthias 2008, p.10). In his discussion of identity, diaspora, and hybridity, Karner (2007 pp. 72-73) explains the way in which ethnicities can be 'cut and mixed' in today's world. Various cultural traditions meet, overlap, and merge in a social space where minority and majority ethnicities inhabit, leading to the emergence of hybrid identities. Karner points out however, that these new hybrid identities are not simply freely chosen from a range of ethnicities on offer, but are context dependant and are developed and negotiated under constraints and power structures. Depending on the context, social actors are able to make constrained choices regarding their ethnic identities.

Anthias (1999, pp.129-134) cautions that while the concept of hybridity is an important one in that it challenges essentialist notions that ethnicity is static, it has its difficulties, particularly because it positions culture as the core element for defining identity and community. The notion of culture in this case needs to be more narrowly defined, she argues, with a focus on cultural products or attributes. Moreover, it is important to distinguish between cultural change and identity politics; the intermingling of ethnic identities, cultural styles, and values does not necessarily mean that ethnic solidarities will change or that racism or prejudice will end. Furthermore, for the migrant, hybridity does not necessarily lead to empowerment and belonging. An individual may adopt some cultural or ethnic traits from the new society and still remain marginalised as 'other' (Anthias 2001, p.622).

It has been argued by Kibria (2000, p.79) that some hybrid ethnicities are better regarded than others; being white in the US is easier to negotiate than being black. But these hybrid ethnicities are 'out there' and have names, such as Mexican American or Arab American. In the case of the children of returned migrants from England to Ireland there is no name. Are they Irish? Or English? Or Both? One can be Northern-Irish, and maybe Scottish-Irish, but the phrase English-Irish seems to have a historically contentious sound to it and as such does not seem plausible.

Accent, ethnicity, and return migration in Ireland

Ireland has had a long history of out-migration, leading to a huge diaspora located all around the world, particularly in the U.S., the U.K., and Australia. This situation changed dramatically, however, with the arrival of the 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom in the 1990s. Rather than *sending* people all over the world, Ireland was now seeing the *arrival* of people from all around the world. Ireland was imagined as a previously homogenous place, where everyone was

white, Irish, settled, and Catholic (Lentin and McVeigh 2006, pp.36-37). As a category of representation, Irishness was seen as being white by default and there were no other interpretations available (Yau 2007, p.58).

During the 'Celtic Tiger' and in the 1990s in particular, the Irish abroad were encouraged to 'come home' to where their country needed them to fill vacant jobs (Hayward and Howard 2007, pp.51-55). Between 1996 and 2005, 221,000 Irish-born migrants returned to the Republic of Ireland (Ni Laoire 2007, p.333).

The reality of returning to Ireland, however, is not always simple. It is complicated by the diasporic discourses that paint Ireland in colours of nostalgia, home, and belonging on the one hand, and by the reality of adjustment upon return on the other. Ni Laoire (2008, pp.35-50) points out that there are contradictory notions about the Irish returned migrant; they are expected to fit back into Irish society without too much bother but are, at the same time, viewed as not being fully Irish, especially if they were not born in Ireland. In order to feel fully accepted, the participants in Ni Laoire's research felt that they had to behave in certain ways, and speaking with an Irish accent was felt to be a must in being accepted. The participants spoke about how they fitted in more easily because they had kept their Irish accents. Some of the participants were quick to distance themselves from 'phoney accents' picked up abroad. Having an Irish accent was equated to being fully Irish.

Hickman *et al*. (2005, pp 175-176) argues that there has been an historical denial within Ireland of the Irish diaspora and that until the 1990s the little public discourse that did exist was centred around derogatory notions such as second-generation Irish as 'plastic Paddies'. The term 'plastic Paddy', Hickman *et al.* argues, is deployed by 'authentic' Irish people to deny the Irishness of second-generation Irish living in Britain; with the implication being that if you

have an English accent, this primary marker of ethnic identity is proof of your Englishness.

Returned migrants and their children are thus caught between the desire to fit in, constrained by their experiences of 'conditional belonging', and their awareness of being different. Returnees talk about returning to Ireland in terms of belonging, community, and family, but are also aware of not belonging. Returning to Ireland can result in feelings of loneliness and isolation, with the returnee inhabiting spaces of the insider and outsider simultaneously (Ni Laoire 2007, p.341).

Methodology

The over-all approach used in this study is qualitative; five participants were selected using volunteer purposive sampling (O'Leary 2004, p.110), and were interviewed using the guided interview technique (Berg 2004, pp.80-81). The interviews were analysed using the method of thematic analysis; this method allows the researcher to observe, interpret, analyse, and theorise (Pole and Lampard 2002, p.190). In order to be selected for inclusion in this study, participants had to possess the criteria outlined below.

Firstly, the participants were required to have at least one Irish parent. Secondly, the participants were to have been born in England or to have moved there before three years of age. Finally, they were to have moved to Ireland, with their parents, at the age of ten or older. It is worth noting here that while this paper refers to the children of returned migrants as 'children', the research is focused on people now over the age of eighteen but who were children at the time of their move. Five participants were selected; four women and one man. Trish, now in her middle years, was born in an urban area in England to an Irish father and English mother, and moved to Ireland in her late teens. Sarah, also

now in her middle years, was born in an English city to Irish parents, and moved to Ireland in her mid-teens. Stacey, now in her early twenties, was born in an English city to Irish parents, and moved to Ireland in her early teens. Jenny, also in her early twenties, was born in Ireland to Irish parents, and lived in an English city from an early age until her late teens, when she moved back to Ireland with her family. Dara, now in his twenties, was born in an urban area of England, and moved to Ireland in his pre-teens with his English mother and Irish father. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Marking Insider/Outsider Status

A common theme to emerge from this study is that being Irish whilst growing up in England involved being surrounded by extended Irish family, celebrating St. Patrick's Day, and visiting Ireland on holidays. For all of the participants, except Jenny, moving to live in Ireland entailed the loss of this community and the subsequent denial of their Irish identity by others. Although the participants may have felt Irish whilst growing up in England, their sense of Irish ethnicity changed both when they visited Ireland on holidays and when they moved to Ireland.

Whilst growing up in England the participants were securely part of a group; that of the Irish diaspora. A powerful myth among diasporic discourses is that of the 'dream of return'; it plays an important symbolic role in the maintenance of diasporic identities and ideologies (Ni Laoire 2008, p.37). However, if the 'dream of return' becomes reality, moving away from the diasporic ethnic group can mean the loss of community membership. Outside of families, communities are a vital source of group membership and social networks, so leaving a community for a new one, for example, by way of migration, can deprive a person and their family of a major source of social capital (Portes 1998, pp.3-11).

When the participants in this study left this group to move to Ireland, their English accents marked them out as 'different' and their Irish ethnicity was denied. They 'knew' they were Irish; they self-identified as such; but were sometimes made to 'feel' English in that others identified them and labeled them as such. For example Sarah explained:

> *I suppose we felt more Irish living in England you know because we were part of the Irish community. There was a lot of I suppose kind of second generation Irish as well there. A lot of our friends there would have been kind of second generation like us, all their parents would have been Irish. But over here we would have been considered the English ones even though we always felt Irish…I suppose because we had really broad [English] accents… we would have stuck out like a sore thumb with the accents so we were considered to be English.* (Sarah)

While in England Sarah identified as second-generation Irish, and this had meaning because others identified her as such. Upon moving to Ireland however, it was no longer sufficient for Sarah to simply identify as and to be accepted as Irish. As Jenkins (2008b, p.44) has pointed out, simply asserting one's identity is not enough, the identity must be accepted by 'significant others' in order to be 'taken on' (Jenkins 2008b, p.44).

As noted, the primary markers of ethnicity are ancestry, culture, and language. Whilst growing up in England, the participants possessed all of these markers to some degree; they had Irish ancestors, participated in Irish activities, and shared the language and accent of other second generation Irish within England. Upon moving to Ireland, however, the forms of markers that they possessed in England were no longer the 'right' markers or the 'right' cultural capital in Ireland; the cultural capital that they had possessed to their advantage in England turned to their disadvantage in Ireland (Creese and Kambere 2003, pp.565-573).

An exception to this was Jenny who moved to Ireland at the age of fourteen having lived in England from the age of two. During her childhood in England she did not develop an English accent because she spent all of her school holidays in Ireland and had very close ties to Irish family and friends. Jenny's Irish accent also reinforced her difference from other children at school in England; she spoke of being from a 'totally different country' and not being 'fully accepted' by them. For Jenny, Ireland was 'home' and she 'never fully accepted' that she should be in England at all. Thus, she moved to Ireland in possession of the one form of cultural capital or 'surface pointer' (Nash 1996, pp. 24-25) that the other participants lacked; she had the 'right' accent (Moore 2008, pp. 101-117). Furthermore, as Jenny visited Ireland so often, she was very familiar with the country and the locality she moved to. For Jenny then, moving to Ireland was 'coming home' and her Irish accent helped her to fit in:

> *…I had a slight Irish accent. You could tell I wasn't English, you could tell I was Irish… It definitely helped that I had an Irish accent. Am, I mean when people found out that I lived in England for 12 years I did get the stick of you're English, you're English; so at least having the Irish accent I think did help to kinda break down those kind of taunts; people kinda realised that she has an Irish accent so she must be Irish kind of thing so yeah it did help an awful lot… it really kinda helped you to kinda blend in and almost be invisible to being bombarded with you're English, you're English like, we're not talking to you because you're English, what are you doing here kinda thing; so yeah, it helped a huge bit.* (Jenny)

Thus Jenny's Irish accent signaled that 'she must be Irish'. The English accents of the other participants, however, marked them out as different and resulted in a denial of their Irish ethnicity and a labeling of their outsider status. For example, Dara explained:

> *...we were suddenly in a situation where how we spoke was a point of difference, when we came to Ireland it became an issue. Within England that wasn't really, it wasn't really the issue...there was this massive difference in how we were going to be perceived by other people you know because basically we moved over; one day...you're being considered Irish and the next thing you come over. You're in a completely different place, no one knows you and you're the English people. You know, you're just referred to as the English people. And you know, it's just a huge shock, huge...very much a barrier in terms of making friends.* (Dara)

This change upon moving to Ireland was strongly linked by the participants to what Nash (1996, pp.24-25) calls 'surface pointers'; dress, ways of acting, and language; in this case particularly accent. These can be seen as forms of cultural capital that one either possesses or does not. Cultural capital is something that when used, can be a social advantage or a disadvantage. Unlike economic capital, the cultural capital of accent cannot be acquired quickly; it is learned, usually in childhood, and if it is not the 'right' accent in a given context it can put the person at a social disadvantage (Moore 2008, pp.101-117).

As noted, many Irish/English are subject to the term 'plastic paddy' and a common theme to emerge from this study was the perception that an English identity has little value in Ireland. For example, Dara spoke of how there was a child in his class from Scotland, but that 'in no way could [the Scottish boy] be perceived as English'. The extent to which the participants felt that their accents portrayed a devalued English identity can be seen clearly in Trish's account of watching a football match between England and Ireland while in a pub in Dublin:

> *I'd long curly red hair and this old man started saying 'yahay! We've an Irish Coleen here this is great!' you know, and I was for the whole match I was afraid to open my mouth! I thought oh, good god when he hears my accent and sees, you know, hears that I'm English, you know, he's just*

> *gonna, he's gonna be utterly disappointed. It was the quietest I've ever been watching a game!* (Trish)

In a study of second-generation Irish in England (Hickman *et al*. 2005, pp 174-176) it was similarly found that claims of Irishness among the second-generation were met with derision in Ireland and the authors attribute this to the 'drama' of the historical relationship between England and Ireland. Stacey explained how she sometimes felt during history class in Ireland:

> *...whenever an issue would come up about the history of when the English came to Ireland and oppression and all that. A lot of people got very heated over the discussion...they'd always be like oh the British did this and British did that like and directed at me, and I wasn't there with my guns, d'you know...They'd be like well your people, your people... (Stacey)*

Belonging?

With the exception of Jenny, who never possessed an English accent, the participants of this study found it difficult at first to feel a sense of belonging in Ireland. Yau's study of second generation Chinese living in Ireland (Yau 2007, pp.48-69), found that the participants were 'othered' by the dominant white society both in every day interactions with people, and by the State by way of the Census form which forced them to characterise their ancestry. Likewise in this study, all the participants except Jenny spoke of the various ways in which they were 'othered' on a daily basis; their accents being the most visible form of divergence from the imagined Irish ideal; that is, to be born in Ireland and to speak with an Irish accent (Ni Laoire 2008, pp.43-44). Dara spoke of how his English accent:

> *...puts you into a box straight away. Am, there was none prejudicial reactions to it, oh you're English. Very prejudicial reactions, oh English you know, I don't want to talk to you... But the accent thing was such a barrier to some people...(Dara)*

While this study found accent to be a key factor in feelings of belonging, the unfamiliar cultural practices and social norms that the participants encountered upon moving to Ireland were also significant. The form of Irishness that was enacted in England, the Irish cultural practices that the participants were exposed to, was very much a diasporic form of Irishness. Being Irish in England entailed celebrating St. Patrick's Day, socialising in Irish Clubs, learning Irish dancing. Upon moving to Ireland, all of the participants, except Jenny, felt Ireland was a 'different culture' to the one they knew in England. For example, Stacey explained how she had never experienced the tradition of Halloween before:

> *…I always kinda felt like a small bit of an outsider just because I knew I was blatantly different to them, I knew I was around different kind of people, you know like around Halloween…they had all their like different kind of traditions and stuff like that…there's like a Halloween cake…and they hide a ring in it or something like that and am, 'oh have you never heard of that?' and I'm like no. They had all their little Halloween games, I had nothing. You know it's fun obviously, it was new, but then again obviously I was like I've never heard of any of this stuff and it was so natural to the rest of them. So I was like oh just try your best, try to fit in, d'you know.* (Stacey)

Both Trish and Dara spoke about how the hobbies they practiced in England were not available to them in Ireland and that this exasperated their feelings of difference and of not belonging. Furthermore, their ways of acting, talking, and dressing, which worked to include them, whilst growing up in England, were 'different' upon moving to Ireland. As Trish remarked, '…I didn't look the same, didn't dress the same, didn't act the same'. Trish explained further:

> *I grew up in a different culture. I grew up in a different environment. I grew up in a different place. I didn't realise it until I came here. It was only when I came here I realised oh my – and again, and I know I'm harping on about it – but this was a long time ago and there was absolutely nothing here. There was no gyms; when you said about joining clubs and sports activities – for women, there might have been the*

> *GAA for men but there was certainly wasn't for women.*
> (Trish)

Hybrid Ethnicities

A consistent theme to emerge from this study is that the process of hybridity is in no way an easy one; very few of the participants felt that sure of how they would describe themselves. Only one participant was sure of her mixed, hybrid identity, while two had chosen not to 'cut and mix' at all but to identify as 'through and through Irish' (Sarah). Stacey, the only participant to be sure of her hybrid identity explains:

> *…probably yeah, mixed identity as well. I feel very, I'm British but I'm Irish and its so, it's so mixed…It's like I'm British but then again I'm proud to be Irish as well, so I don't know, yeah probably mixed, a mixed identity. D'you know I still, I always say Britain is where I'm from, this is where I was born and raised yet I've been living here for a long time now as well and I've Irish parents and roots and feel very grounded in kinda both countries. Not one would be stronger than the other… I'd say I'm Irish/English.*
> (Stacey)

For the two participants who chose not to 'cut and mix' but to identify strongly as Irish only, it can be argued that they possessed the most cultural capital upon arriving in Ireland. Sarah, although she had and still has an English accent, grew up in England listening to Irish-language radio, and took up Irish as a subject when she moved here at the age of thirteen. Although she has a 'fondness' for the city she grew up in, she now feels 'through and through Irish'. Likewise, Jenny, who moved here with an Irish accent, explains:

> *I wouldn't describe myself as Irish/English anyway. I would be, personally to myself I'd be Irish that lived in England for a few years. I do have close connections to England, like I said it will always be a part of me… it's still a part of me but I wouldn't classify myself as English.* (Jenny)

Two participants, Trish and Dara, found that articulating any clear form of identity, hybrid or otherwise was difficult. For example, when asked how she would describe herself, Trish answered:

> *...that's a tough one now actually! Very tough one! God, I surprised, it's a tough one. Because in England I was Irish Catholic and that's what we were termed as and that was it. Here? I don't know. I married an Irish man do you know...oh, I'm Irish, I have an Irish passport. I've an Irish speaking daughter. I've an Irish husband. I guess, I've still got mixed parentage, I'm still you know, born in England. I lived in England sixteen years, I've lived here twenty-six years. So by rights I should be finding that question easy and say Irish. I still find it difficult. Yeah. Still find it difficult to identify myself as being fully Irish. But I guess I'm 70/30 now. Seventy Irish, thirty English maybe. I don't know.* (Trish)

Trish is aware that an ethnic identity is something that can be chosen, but she struggles to place herself and in the end makes a choice that is 'cut and mixed' but not certain. Likewise, Dara is aware that identity is something that can be chosen, and although he does describe himself as Irish, he struggles with this and the notion that he can chose a mixed identity:

> *I'd probably describe myself as Irish now [but]… I really don't choose to characterise myself. If someone would say 'where are you from?' I always pause because I don't know, I really don't…I think I have a freedom to choose that other people probably don't have. So I enjoy that aspect of it. Am, and I find that by holding onto that kind of none-national identity I get to be more critical of both English and Irish and I think that can only be healthy. So I generally choose not to identify as one or the other. If I have to, if it benefits or if it greases the wheels in other areas then I will identify myself as one or the other. Am, just to you know, get ahead or that kind of thing but generally speaking I'm not, I wouldn't classify myself as one or the other.* (Dara)

Both Trish's and Dara's accounts here point to Anthias' cautionary argument that while hybridity is an important concept because it challenges essentialist

notions of the fixity of ethnicity, it is not without its difficulties (Anthias 1999, pp.129-134). While hybridity can be empowering for some, it does not necessarily lead to belonging or an end to racism or prejudice; an individual may still remain marginalised as 'other' (Anthias 2001, p.622).

There is a further problem with the concept of hybridity; it assumes a 'free-floating person' (Anthias 1999, p.131) who has agency to freely choose and 'cut and mix' (Karner 2007, pp.72-73) ethnic identities. Agency in this context, however, is always exercised within the wider system of social constraints, within which actors find themselves (Anthias 1999, p.131). For this reason, some hybrid ethnic identities are easier to negotiate than others. For example, it has been argued (Kibria 2000, p.79) that in the United States, white people have considerably more options when it comes to choosing ethnic identities than black people. Those of African ancestry can only really be 'black'. The individual is not the primary constructor of ethnic identity; in order for the identity to be socially real, it must be recognised as such by significant others (Jenkins 2008b, p.44).

Both Trish and Dara are clearly aware of their 'otherness' and of the difficulty in negotiating hybridity. This may be linked to the fact that both have one English parent and to their strong (in comparison to the other participants) links to English cultural practices - both participated in either English sports or clubs - and to their rejection of Irish versions of these. Both Sarah and Jenny reject the notion of hybridity, identifying strongly as Irish. Unlike Trish and Dara, Sarah and Jenny did not speak of being involved in any English cultural practices whilst growing up in England, only Irish ones. The ease with which they identify as Irish may have much to do with the Irish cultural practices that they became involved in once they moved to Ireland – such as learning Irish (in Sarah's case) and playing camogie (Jenny). Jenny's Irish accent further helped

her to fit in. Overall then, the response of the participants in this study suggest that although it is possible to adopt a hybrid ethnic identity, it can be difficult to negotiate this within an Irish context.

Conclusion

For the participants of this study then, growing up in England was to be part of a distinct ethnic community. The boundary markers that distinguish one ethnicity from another; ancestry, culture, and language were possessed by all the participants. To have an English accent in England was acceptable as most second-generation Irish have this. Upon moving to Ireland, however, all the participants except Jenny experienced a kind of 'loss'; describing the move as upsetting, even 'horrific' and traumatising. All of the participants spoke of losing their friends. When they moved to Ireland their ancestry was denied, many aspects of the culture were new, and their language, their accent-made developing a sense of belonging difficult. Their English accents worked to instantly mark them out as 'other', and as not authentically Irish. Furthermore, an English accent is not a valued form of cultural capital in Ireland, largely due to the uneasy historical relationship between Britain and Ireland. This study has also shown that hybridity is not simply a matter of choice; and in the context of Ireland, a hybrid ethnic identity that blends Englishness/Britishness with Irishness is particularly problematic.

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