Introduction: Myth, memory and emotional adaption: the Irish in post-war England and the 'composure' of migrant subjectivities

Centring the migrant experience

The history of British–Irish relations is often told through the prism of political events. When such an approach is adopted, the plot is woven around moments of high political drama and the legacies of episodic conflict. Yet this relationship, so important in the development of both countries, has always had a less conspicuous human dimension: the traffic of ordinary people who cross the Irish Sea to fashion new lives amidst unfamiliar settings. These journeys are more than a lens through which to read the hidden societal effects and experiential realities of a fraught political relationship; migration between the two islands is a vector through which the British–Irish connection is lived and defined. Migrants are participants in, as well as artefacts of, an evolving dialogue, and their life histories enact, as well as register, its diverse reciprocities, unresolved contradictions and unconsidered possibilities.

This chapter outlines one approach to analysing such life histories and the light they shed on the Irish migrant experience in England. Two critical arguments are developed, namely that existing approaches to migrant 'identity' within the historiography of the Irish in Britain have underplayed the complexity of Irish subjectivities in England; and that, where it has been employed as a 'record' of migrant experience, oral historical research has been complicit in this, due largely to the 'recovery' approach which scholars have employed to reconstruct the Irish migrant experience in the twentieth century. To address these concerns, this Introduction outlines an alternative, dialogic approach to the migrant experience based on Popular Memory Theory, the central framework employed in this book.

From 'segregation' to 'assimilation'

In the first chapter of his celebrated account of working-class life in Edwardian Salford, *The Classic Slum*, the teacher and writer Robert Roberts described the strict social hierarchies governing everyday life in the neighbourhood he knew as a boy. As Roberts recalled, forming 'the base of the social pyramid' were 'bookies' runners, idlers, part-time beggars and petty thieves, together with those known to have been in prison'. Below even that, however, were Irish Catholic immigrants, who, until the arrival of newcomers after 1945, inhabited a milieu all of their own:

> Still another family would be scorned loudly in a drunken tiff for marrying off its daughter to some 'low Mick from the Bog'. With us, of course, as with many cities in the North, until the coming of the coloured people Irish Roman Catholic immigrants, mostly illiterate, formed the lowest socio-economic stratum. A slum Protestant marrying into the milieu suffered a severe loss of face. Such unions seldom occurred.[1]

Roberts's depiction of the lowly status of the Irish, published in 1971, portrays one of the most pervasive stories of Irish settlement circulating within post-war English culture. According to this view, while the Irish formed an 'outcast' population within Victorian society, when Irish migration to Britain peaked, the 'coming of the coloured people' after 1945 effected a major transition in their position, marking their integration into English working-class life.[2] As a more recent tradition of representation contends, however, the sharpness of this arc of transformation is open to serious question. While prominent Victorian reformers certainly mobilised the Irish as a scapegoat for contemporary urban problems, the imagery of otherness they bequeathed to popular memory exaggerated the extent of Irish communal segregation.[3] As a revisionist counter-historiography here suggests, Irish settlement experiences in nineteenth-century Britain were characterised by variation and change over time: although the Irish often inhabited the worst sections of the labour and housing markets, and were subject to overlapping forms of racial, religious and class-based hostility, rarely did they form a cohesive community impermeably divided from local populations; indeed, having occupied a 'curious middle place' for most of the century, by 1914 'successive generations' appeared to have 'merged into the anonymous background of English and Scottish urban life'.[4] Declining numbers, the arrival of migrants from Eastern Europe, increased upward mobility and the growing incorporation of the Irish into the patterns of mainstream politics all played a part in facilitating

the long-run integration of the Irish, well before the seminal transformations of the post-war decades.[5]

As such, according to this revisionist perspective, the 'arrival of the coloured people' after 1945 confirmed, rather than initiated, a transformation in the position of the Irish within British society. If the Irish continued to come to Britain in large numbers in the twentieth century, the historiography of their experiences peters out at the end of the nineteenth, a fact explained by some historians in terms of the increasing ease with which the Irish have been able to melt into British society. In the decades after 1945 in particular, when the numbers of Irish migrants to Britain rose to levels comparable with the mid-nineteenth century, few, it seemed, would encounter the sorts of problems experienced by settlers in that earlier period. Where the 'arrival of the coloured people' generated serious social and political tensions in post-war society, contemporary policy makers and social experts appeared to regard the Irish as members of the same racially homogenous British 'family': despite Eire's withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1949, Irish migrants retained dual citizenship rights in Britain at a time when other, less numerous migrants were made subject to new immigration controls.[6] When these benign official responses are added to Irish migrants' relatively high rates of occupational and social mobility, relatively high rates of intermarriage and exogamy and relatively low rates of reported discrimination, 'Irish assimilation into British society' appears 'among the fastest that occurs among immigrant groups anywhere in the world':

> Assimilation is practically complete in a single generation. The children of Irish immigrants, sometimes to the distress of their parents, grow up seeing themselves as English or Scots; they may acknowledge their Irish ancestry and exhibit a few inherited traits, but for all practical purposes they are indistinguishable from their British peers whether in respect of dress or in social, cultural or religious behaviour.[7]

If the experiences of Irish migrants, presented as a set of discrete statistical averages, are set in comparison with those of migrants from beyond the 'British Isles', and if they are measured over the long term, this assimilation perspective appears plausible from a *relative* standpoint. A major problem for such an approach, however, concerns just what can be inferred about the *meaning* of migrant experience from the calculation of group averages. It is not just that the aggregation of data at group level tends to obscure important variations at the level of the family or individual, or that assimilationists underplay the significance of important continuities in the experiences of Irish migrants in the twentieth century, but that criteria such as intermarriage, occupation and mobility are automatically assumed to provide objective evidence of *identification*, the

dual possibilities for which have already been set by the native/immigrant opposition underlying the framework.

A given migrant may attain levels of occupational and social mobility similar to that of the 'average' English person, but it does not follow that this migrant *experiences* mobility in the same way. The migrant's experience, rather, is mediated by a range of factors, from the nature of their pre-departure socialisation to the persistence of anti-Irish stereotypes, all of which differentiate how mobility is interpreted and a sense of settled selfhood established. Assimilation and ethnic belonging are not mutually exclusive processes; *integration* may encompass both, engendering adaptions and continuities simultaneously, yielding plural and mutative attachments.

Green, white and invisible: Irish identity and the 'ethnic turn'

In light of its various problems, and in keeping with wider intellectual trends in the 1990s, the assimilation paradigm has come under heavy attack, most powerfully in the work of Mary J. Hickman. According to Hickman, whose formulations have had a major influence on recent academic production within the historiography, the Irish in Britain have not 'assimilated' per se; rather, their experiences have been rendered 'invisible' due to the masking effects of a state-sponsored 'myth of white homogeneity that implicitly includes a myth of assimilation'.[8] This thesis rests on a number of premises. In opposition to revisionist accounts of the 'outcast' status of the Irish in modern British history, Hickman stresses the role of the Irish Catholic as a constitutive other in the formation of a coherent British national identity. The Irish Catholic was not only a colonial and religious other in Victorian society, but embodied a serious political threat to national elites: 'a particular fear was that political unity might be forged between the Irish peasantry and the English working-class'.[9] In response, the British state sought to 'incorporate' the Irish as part of its project of producing British national identity. At the conceptual level, this involved constructing the different peoples of the 'British Isles' as 'one race'. At the institutional level, 'state-assisted Catholic elementary schools came to be viewed as the principal long-term means of resolving the "problem" posed by the Irish Catholic working-class'. At the state's behest, the Catholic Church would thus secure the 'incorporation' of the Irish through an education-based programme of 'denationalisation', 'strengthening their Catholic identity at the expense of weakening their national identity'.[10]

Post-war discourses on race and immigration reinforced the masking effects of these strategies. In this period, in the context of debates concerning who legitimately belonged to the nation, social scientists

and the state cooperated in the construction of a 'race relations industry'. Underpinned by the assumption that contemporary problems of 'immigration' and racism were of recent origin, 'race relations' institutionalised skin colour as the key criterion in relation to which questions of belonging and discrimination were analysed. In so doing, the paradigm reinforced the idea that British culture had been 'racially' homogenous prior to post-war immigration from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan. Consequently, the position of the Irish as an internal other of British national culture in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was rendered 'invisible' in contemporary discussions of discrimination and minority status.[11] In a context where a steady flow of mobile Irish labour was indispensable for British economic reconstruction, this omission enabled politicians to publicly justify Irish migrants' exclusion from immigration controls in terms of a shared 'British' racial heritage that distinguished them from 'coloured' migrants.[12]

For Hickman, two important implications follow from these points. Insofar as we can talk about Irish 'assimilation' in Britain, this should not be seen as a voluntary or unmediated process, but as the effect of state-led projects of 'incorporation' and 'denationalisation'.[13] Secondly, while the state's project of producing the peoples of the 'British Isles' as 'one race' may have rendered the distinctiveness of Irish experiences 'invisible', it does not automatically follow that the Irish 'assimilate' in the way described by scholars such as Akenson or Hornsby-Smith. The state's attempts to neutralise the threat posed by 'the Irish' did not, according to Hickman, necessarily lead to a 'loss' of identity. Religiously segregated education, the principal means by which denationalisation was to be achieved, reinforced the segregation of the Catholic Irish within the British working class, such that 'the assiduous training of the young in the primacy of Catholic identity ensured that … the differentiation of Irish Catholics and their descendants, from their neighbours and often from their workmates, was regenerated across many decades'.[14] On the other hand, many Irish Catholics would also maintain 'spheres which were protected from the interference of the Church … in which a variety of forms of belonging were possible'.[15] Thus, 'the quiescence of Irish Catholics lay in the acceptance of a public mask of Catholicism as its communal identity',[16] a fact which does not disturb 'the twentieth-century legacy' of a coherent Irish 'community' existing beneath the veneer of 'invisibility':

> The Irish had formed a community. One which is characterised by heterogeneity; its differentiation from the indigenous working class: having been historically segregated in its own social space; and by an ethnicity formed by the articulation of religion, class and national identity in a context of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic discourses and practices.[17]

Having redefined 'assimilation' as 'invisibility', the intellectual goal thus becomes 'visibility'. Working off the assumption that 'the Irish' constitute a hidden 'ethnic minority' in Britain, from the 1990s scholars across a range of disciplines have undertaken investigations into the experiences of Irish migrants that implicitly or explicitly sought to 'make visible' the object of their analysis. As well as demonstrating the continued salience of Irish ethnic identifications in twentieth-century Britain, such as in the work of Sharon Lambert, Louise Ryan and Sean Sorohan,[18] this has involved uncovering experiences of marginalisation and discrimination.[19] At the heart of the 'invisibility' paradigm, and stemming from the idea that 'invisibility' is an effect of the British state's efforts to manage the social and political threat Irish people are perceived to pose in Britain, is the claim that the Irish, like immigrant groups from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia, suffer forms of exclusion and racial oppression in Britain. More than any others, such themes have informed academic production in the last three decades, prompting and taking centre stage in enquiries into Irish experiences in relation to work, physical and mental health and the effects of the Troubles in Britain.

Deconstructing the optical metaphor: the politics and paradoxes of 'invisibility'

In the 1990s, such studies helped reopen debate on questions of Irish identity in Britain, stimulating much-needed discussion on the experiences of the Irish in the twentieth century. In the pivotal work of Mary Hickman, this was achieved through unmasking the unexamined but inherently political assumptions underlying monoculturalist claims about the inevitability of 'assimilation', and through reintroducing the fraught history of British–Irish political relations and British colonialism in Ireland as structuring variables of the experiences of Irish migrants in Britain. In this respect, the 'invisibility' paradigm poses a critical challenge to the cultural and historiographical forgetting of a much longer pre-Windrush history of 'multicultural racism' in Britain,[20] and in the process makes an important contribution to the emerging literature on 'whiteness' in the British context.[21]

More critically, however, a number of problems attach to various emphases central to the 'invisibility' framework, not least of which concerns the way British–Irish relations, defined in terms of conflict and opposition, have been mobilised as a principle of continuity in the determination of Irish identities. So although it is the incorporating impulses of the British state and 'British national identity' more generally which are held responsible for Irish 'invisibility', it is only through narrating the story of the Irish in Britain as a struggle for identity, in which 'the Irish' and

'British' are figured as protagonist/antagonist, that opposing Irish/British collectivities are established. Through treating British–Irish relations as a constant principle of binary division, in other words, overlapping oppositions between Irish/British, Catholic/Protestant and immigrant/native labour may be mapped onto the ethnic minority/majority opposition in order to secure the boundaries and internal coherence of an Irish ethnic identity at the level of theoretical discussion.

One obvious concern with such a framing is the lack of room it leaves for difference *within* the Irish migrant experience in modern Britain: not all Irish migrants were Catholic; nor were they all working class. More fundamentally, however, the binary structure of this formulation unduly limits the possibilities of identity formation: relations between Britain and Ireland, and the forms of ascription Irish migrants have been subject to in Britain, have been marked as much by change, ambivalence and plurality as they have by continuity. British culture registers a powerful tendency to forget Britain's problematic historical involvement in Ireland, and this has important implications, not only for the representation of the Irish within British memory, but for the counter-formation of Irish communal mythology. It does not follow from this, however, that the relationship between Britishness and Irishness is intrinsically antagonistic: 'the dichotomy of self and other' does not adequately capture the ways in which British–Irish conflict and the constant presence of the Irish were negotiated within modern English society. As Steven Fielding has argued, if interwar English culture continued to display an ingrained 'cultural bias', migrants neither assimilated under duress nor lived lives apart from their English neighbours, isolated by 'impermeable boundaries'. Settlement, rather, involved 'adaption of both immigrant and indigenous peoples': 'the experience of Irish Catholics was partly structured by the culture in which they found a place and that culture was, in turn, transformed by their presence'.[22]

As Mo Moulton has convincingly argued, this exchange was powerfully impacted by the domestic cultural legacies of the Anglo-Irish war, shaping how Irishness could be imagined in interwar England and the 'middle place' Irish migrants could inhabit. While the Anglo-Irish Treaty achieved a political settlement of the Irish Question, the creation of a parliament in Dublin left unaddressed the fact that Irish people and cultures would remain an integral part of British society. To navigate this contradiction, Irishness was rendered simultaneously foreign and familiar; the production of domestic British stability after 1922 was here partially predicated on a form of disavowal which enabled the accommodation of Irish identities within the British state while containing their subversive implications.

On the one hand, the political connotations of Irishness continued to pose a symbolic threat in the aftermath of war and had to be rendered 'foreign' to secure the boundaries of Englishness – an institutionalised

ethnic politics could not be accommodated within the English party system, and the arrival of large numbers of Irish labour migrants in the 1930s 'sparked a set of anxieties about immigration and racial purity that foreshadowed the discourses around post-colonial immigrants after 1945'.[23] On the other hand, however, 'Irishness remained embedded in the very fabric of English life' in ways that reflected the influence of wider modernising trends within English popular culture. While the English population continued to engage with Irishness enthusiastically, through literature, travel and public spectacle, the Irish in England adopted a 'strategy of partial assimilation, in which leisure, nostalgic commemoration, and religious community mostly displaced the active political mobilisation of 1919–21'. In this way, Irishness was 'removed from the volatile realm of politics and reassigned to the rich interwar landscape of domestic and associational life' where it became an integral but distinctive identity within English culture:[24]

> Its salience varied widely and its meanings were often deeply personal and idiosyncratic, but it remained, after 1921, a bright green thread woven into the lives of people of many backgrounds and perspectives. Its presence was not merely decorative but indicative of important mechanisms of social accommodation in the face of ethnic diversity at the beginning of decolonisation.[25]

The arrival of black and Asian migrants in the decades after 1945 both extended and reconditioned this process of accommodation. From one perspective, since the domestication of Irishness was necessarily unstable, so the foregrounding of colour as a key criterion of cultural difference could mask how the reverberating effects of Anglo-Irish conflict continued to articulate in the period after 1945. In turn, the 'whitewashing' of Britishness can be seen as implicated in the production of the Irish as an 'invisible ethnic minority', first in the sense that the assumption of white homogeneity masks variation and hierarchy within experiences of whiteness, but also, paradoxically, in the sense that designation as an 'ethnic minority' itself depends upon the formulation of a racialised ontology of a multicultural society. Recognition as an 'ethnic minority' was not possible during the Victorian or interwar periods, but it became an option once an official 'race relations' paradigm was constructed and elaborated from the 1960s.

At the same time, however, the 'whitewashing' of Britishness after 1945 might also be seen to have reinforced the production of Irishness as a domesticated form of ethnic identity, identified, by community leaders as well as external observers, with conservative Catholic values, the performance and consumption of Irish cultural traditions and a limited social welfare function. This held true, for example, for many of

the Irish clubs, centres and associations established in the larger post-war settlement destinations, a process initiated in the 1950s, and powerfully influenced and financially aided by the Church.[26] Thus, while the disorderly behaviour of young male and female migrants did attract attention from contemporary observers in this period, particularly from within the networks of Catholic welfare in England, institutions such as the county associations conceived themselves as non-political social bodies, their itineraries and records reflecting a combined interest in respectable sociability and social networking, socio-economic advancement and the celebration of national origins.[27] According to the journal of the largest such body, the London Irish Counties Association:

> Being a member of a County Association has its advantages in so far as one meets many old friends of former years, and makes new friends and one need never feel lonely in this great City when, for the asking, one can enjoy a pleasant conversation, a dance, a quiet drink, or a social evening amongst your own people and see them at their best. One becomes conversant with all aspects of Irish life in London, which opens up a new vista in the social sphere. Ladies are not alone welcome, but indeed encouraged to join their Association and to play their part as members of various committees. It has been said that the County Associations are one of the greatest organised bodies of Irish people in London and, being non-sectarian and non-political, we enforce no code in politics and no creed in religion, but we expect all our members to be national in outlook, promoting at all times the image of Ireland and things Irish so that our Homeland may benefit from our connection.[28]

Similarly, while popular stereotypes of the Irish continued to betray latent anxieties around the unresolved political relationship between Britain and Ireland, in general Irish migrants were not publicly defined 'in terms of an incapacity for domestic and familial life'[29] in the manner which positioned other migrants beyond the boundaries of white Englishness. The relationship between internal and external designations was thus complex in the Irish case: if the academic discourse on 'invisibility' has sought to define the boundaries of Irish ethnicity in terms of a series of vertically aligned oppositions (Irish/British, Catholic/Protestant, invisible/visible), in practice Irish migrants were confronted with a shifting and contradictory scheme of external designations (immigrant/white/ethnic) by which to locate themselves.

This flattening of the history of categorical designations is in turn symptomatic of a more general problem in approaches stressing 'invisibility', namely the way the rhetorical nature of the concept habitually retreats to transparency in discussions of Irish identity, disguising how the

context of its production conditioned its formulation and deployment. For 'invisibility' never merely described an objective historical reality, but was fashioned through a politically active form of ethnic mobilisation in the 1980s. Initiated during a period in which the political representation of post-war immigrant groups emerged as a major theme of public debate in Britain, this process embodied a coordinated attempt by a network of Irish activist groups, academics and social welfare organisations to campaign for the inclusion of Irish migrants within the framework of multicultural politics in Britain, and as such marked an important shift in how bodies identified with 'the Irish in Britain' addressed themselves to governmental institutions and the public sphere.[30] Focused initially on securing access to local policy networks, from the mid-1980s activists turned increasingly to building a case for ethnic recognition at the national level, combining demands for identity recognition and socio-economic redistribution, and coming to centre on the inclusion of an 'Irish' ethnic category on British census forms. At the heart of the discourse generated around ethnic mobilisation thus lay a dynamic of application and refusal whereby activist-researchers attempted, unsuccessfully until 1997, to persuade the Commission for Racial Equality of 'the need to make Irish issues more visible so that their existence and legitimacy is acknowledged'.[31]

Ethnic mobilisation thus stimulated a proliferation of discursive practices on Irish experience that, drawing heavily on the language of contemporary anti-racism movements, sought to make 'visible' a history of anti-Irish racism. As well as the surveys and reports of local welfare organisations, these dynamics informed practices of letter-writing to influential figures in the media and government, the literature of newly formed activist groups such as the Irish in Britain Representation Group and the London Irish Women's Centre and even the journalism of the *Irish Post*, whose founder Brendan Mac Lau frequently used his editorial to popularise the notion of an 'Irish ethnic community' among the paper's readership. So long as recognition was refused at an official level, however, a story of 'invisibility' was also necessary in order to explain why the evidence for anti-Irish discrimination seemed so elusive and, implicitly, to explain why no post-war history of Irish mobilisation was apparent, when Irish migration was at its peak.[32] The notion of Irish 'invisibility' was thus not only produced in relation to that of 'assimilation', but drew its meaning from the construct of the 'ethnic minority', specifically black ethnic minorities. 'The Irish' were thus not 'invisible' per se, but *relative* to black and Asian minorities, and activists and researchers sought to convince sceptical authorities that black and Irish migrants shared common histories and experiences. In November 1992 Angie Birtill, a housing and welfare rights officer at London Irish Women's Centre, wrote to Jim Smellie, senior manager of Homeless in London, to complain about

the organisation's failure to distinguish the Irish as a separate group in a recent report on homelessness in the City. Birtill felt that:

> The fact that the 'Health and Homeless in Hackney' report fails to acknowledge the ethnic minority status of the Irish is deeply insulting. Your omission not only ignores the scale of disadvantage and discrimination facing Irish people in this country. It also represents a very narrow application of the race relations legislation to the concerns of the Irish community. The disadvantage and discrimination facing Irish people is rooted in the historical and continuing colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland in a way that effectively mirrors the colonial relationship between Britain and non-white communities … We do not accept your justification for putting all the European 'white' groups together.[33]

As Birtill's reference to the 'continuing colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland' here indicates, the Troubles, *c.* 1968–1998, in Northern Ireland, figured as a 'colonial war', represented a key discursive tactic by which activists attempted to elide differences between the Irish and other non-white minorities. As Paul Gilroy has noted, the intensification of political mobilisation among black activists in the 1980s took place amidst vocal public debates about the national belonging of the British-born offspring of post-war immigrants then 'coming of age' within Thatcherite Britain.[34] Irish ethnic mobilisation too may be read as a response to these developments: collective biography of the actors involved suggests that participants were not by and large migrants of the post-war decades, but drawn from a more self-consciously political second generation, many of whom were beneficiaries of expanding opportunities in British higher education in the post-war period. But in the Irish case mobilisation was also triggered and shaped by the effects of the Troubles in Britain, which, particularly in the wake of Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) attacks in England, incited a resurgence of popular anti-Irish racism. According to *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain*, 'attitudes which had been expressed openly in the 1950s and 1960s in the advertisements in newsagents windows as "No Blacks, No Irish" and "No Irish need apply"' were now 'raised to a new level of intensity', while there was 'very little attempt to understand the political situation out of which the bombings came'. In turn, 'Irish responses to this hostility invariability took the form of avoidance of contact with British people and attempts to remain invisible by staying silent.'[35] Yet, for many second-generation activists the Troubles formed the context in which they became politically conscious of their Irishness. At a time when 'relations between the neighbouring islands are at the most serious for perhaps sixty years', observed Ivan Gibbons in 1981, 'more and more Irish people in this country are becoming aware of

what is loosely called their "heritage" and "culture".[36] Angie Birtill her-self, whose mother had migrated to England from Meath in the post-war years, recalled that:

> The civil rights movement and Bloody Sunday focused my Irishness and I think it did for a lot of other people as well. Suddenly there were images being flashed up on the television of Irish Catholics like our-selves being batoned by the RUC and B-Specials and later being shot by British paratroopers. I remember big arguments breaking out in my classroom at school amongst daughters of service people who attempted to justify what the troops had done and those of us who were absolutely mad about it. I remember falling out with some of my friends over Bloody Sunday and being aware of other girls who were second-generation Irish, suddenly forming a connection with them, and not realising or ever having been conscious that they had been Irish until that point and suddenly I saw their anger that I felt too. For a lot of second-generation Irish people, not just from Liverpool but throughout this country, Bloody Sunday forced those who had not been conscious of their identity or who had brushed it to one side to take stock of who they were.[37]

A similar motif of ethnic awakening, centring on the effects of the Troubles, was also hinted at in the recollections of Mary Hickman, whose parents migrated to England before the Second World War:

> Now my Irishness is to the forefront as director of an Irish Studies centre. I'd say my sense of Irishness went through a process of dor-mancy in my late teens when I was at university, but, inevitably, like a lot of people, Northern Ireland made one have to think about it.[38]

Representing the Troubles as a 'colonial war' was part and parcel of the discourse around ethnic mobilisation because it helped erode the categor-ical distinction between black and Irish experience through projecting a shared history of British colonisation. But the Troubles was also a trigger for mobilisation because the discriminatory practices it generated in England could be read as an effect of conflict in the 'homeland', a con-flict through which the difference between 'British' and 'Irish' could be clarified. The Troubles thus provided the stimulus for a diasporic politics through which some members of the second generation, their sense of difference hitherto hidden or 'dormant', could secure recognition for a felt sense of difference outwardly 'invisible' within British culture.

Crucially, however, this diasporic politics could only function as a means of becoming 'visible' to the extent that it sharpened the distinc-tion between 'Irish' and 'British', that is, to the extent the conflict in

Northern Ireland could be seen as a 'war' between the British state and 'Irish Catholics like ourselves' in which second-generation activists could recognise their own struggles. As well as predisposing activist groups involved in ethnic mobilisation towards an anti-colonial Republican interpretation of Irish history, this kind of investment motivated the discovery of analogies between the situation in Northern Ireland and the experiences of the Irish in Britain. Where the community bodies established by post-war settlers viewed the Troubles apprehensively, as endangering the myth of Irish respectability they worked hard to promote, second-generation activists recast the history of the Irish in Britain within the context of a nationalist mythology of dispossession and struggle between 'these islands'.

Perhaps most significant in this respect were the 1981 Republican hunger strikes in the Maze Prison, the emotive outcome of which stimulated the replenishment of a powerful myth of Irish suffering at British hands within the columns and letters pages of the *Irish Post*. Where the founders of the paper had singularly failed to mobilise the 'Irish community' as cohesive voting bloc since its establishment in 1971, from 1981 onwards the publication became a focus for the organisation of new activist groups who, critical of what they perceived as the docility of the pre-existing Federation of Irish Societies, advanced a militant per-spective on the Troubles' implications for the Irish in Britain.[39] According to the newly established Irish in Britain Representation Group (IBRG), the discriminatory operation of the 1974 Prevention of Terrorism Act, as well as the wider hostility displayed towards Irish people, merely reflected a longer history of British oppression, rooted ultimately in colo-nial domination.[40] According to a 1986 policy statement:

> [T]he lives of Irish people living in Britain are underscored and structured by Britain's relationship to Ireland and … this relationship has historically been one of intervention on the part of Britain. It is this intervention which has resulted in the situation in Ireland and the disadvantaged position of the Irish community in Britain. The IBRG recognises that the statelet of 'Northern Ireland' was deliber-ately created by the 1920 Government of Ireland Act and maintained against the wishes of the majority of Irish people. The IBRG also recognises that the war in 'Northern Ireland' is a direct result of British colonial policy and we therefore maintain that any just and lasting solution must include a recognition of the island of Ireland as a single, independent, sovereign political unit. The IBRG recognises that this continuing war has led to attacks on the civil liberties and political rights of Irish people living in Britain.[41]

The discourse on Irish experience generated around ethnic mobilisa-tion in the 1980s thus syncretised the schemas of British multiculturalism

and a nationalist mythology with much deeper roots in British–Irish history. Multiculturalism supplied the concept of an 'ethnic minority' entitled to recognition on the grounds of cultural difference and discrimination, and Irish nationalism supplied an adversarial interpretation of Anglo-Irish history that helped legitimate the insertion of Irish migrants within that framework, that could naturalise the basis of difference and discrimination and that could even explain its 'invisibility' in terms of the incorporating strategies of the coloniser.

The importance of these observations here is not that the history of ethnic mobilisation invalidates the use of 'invisibility' as an analytic category, but that any attempt to understand the production of Irish identities in England needs to think reflexively about how the discursive practices and circuits of knowledge transmission engendered through this process have played into the shaping of Irish subjectivities after 1945. The point is not that the findings of activist-researchers associated with mobilisation struggle to meet standards of evidential reliability, but that ethnic mobilisation subjected Irish experiences in Britain to a state-sponsored 'multicultural gaze', rendering them 'visible' in ways consonant with the criteria for ethnic recognition. In so doing, ethnic mobilisation constructed, generalised and disseminated a powerful version of Irish experience, incorporating a repertoire of stock images and categories of self-ascription, while actively submerging and re-editing others. These meanings shaped and were transmitted through the practices of community bodies, academics, writers and journalists, but they also competed with other narratives of experience within the communal memory of post-war settlement, and as such had to be negotiated by ordinary migrants, who might incorporate, rework or contest them as part of personal strategies of memory. To date, however, the relationship between these memory processes and the racialised categories of identity generated through ethnic mobilisation has not registered as an important dynamic in research on Irish subjectivities in Britain.[42]

It follows from this that the deployment of 'invisibility' as a transparent concept in relation to post-war migration has also involved a kind of historical projection, by which an institutional discourse generated in the 1980s and 1990s has been imaged back on to processes of settlement and identification that have their own historical specificity. A problematic consequence of this is that post-war migrant experiences tend to be figured in terms of negation and lack. Where the community histories of other minority groups have been criticised for portraying sanitised accounts of harmonious integration, Irish community activism during this period has utilised a form of 'oppression history' where themes of suffering, discrimination and disadvantage are amplified.[43] Whether they are figured as 'invisible', 'unrecognised' or 'incorporated', or nostalgicised as the last traces of a disappearing communal authenticity, post-war

Irish subjectivities are routinely treated as something absent or lost, diminished or repressed.

Undoubtedly, this tendency is associated with the ephemerality and dispersal of the post-war migrant community, but it is also an effect of conceiving the British–Irish relationship solely in terms of domination. Not only does this framing assign post-war migrants the position of victim; it implicitly equates 'agency' and personhood with the realisation of a particular normative definition of ethnic empowerment inscribed within the debates around official multiculturalism in the 1980s. The point, however, is that migrants were never merely *effects* of a static political relationship; they *made themselves* through active negotiation of the discourses of identity they encountered in both sending and receiving societies, and through this shaped the post-war development of the British–Irish relationship and its reciprocal impacts on both cultures. The subjectivities constituted through this process thus have a validity of their own as a research object, and require to be treated on their own terms, within the lived contexts in which they were generated.

This last point leads into a third general problem, namely that approaches which deploy 'invisibility' unflexively, positing British–Irish antagonism as the underlying determinant of Irish subjectivities, tend to obscure the ways wider processes of cultural production and social interaction play into the dynamics of migrant self-fashioning. Although Ireland left the Commonwealth in this period, in reality mass migration enhanced the socio-cultural interconnections between England and Ireland after 1945, fostering diverse forms of exchange within a wider context of societal transformation. Irish people left Ireland, not only because the Irish economy was stagnant, but because British social and economic reconstruction offered expanding opportunities for employment and leisure, consumption and sociability. One implication of this was that emigrants, via the extensive transnational networks they created, formed a powerful vector of cultural change within post-war Irish society: returning home at regular intervals, flush with money and stories about the excitements of urban life, emigrants helped disseminate alternative models of individuated selfhood within rural culture, disturbing the hegemony of Catholic-nationalist ideals in the process. A second implication, however, was that these investments in English urban identity also shaped migrants' negotiation of difference within the settlement process: migrants were subject to a shifting repertoire of racial categories, in both sending and receiving societies, but how they responded to these discourses and fashioned new forms of belonging was unavoidably mediated through the advent of 'affluence' and the idealisation of domesticity, social liberalisation and religious decline.

So while the Irish in post-war England could be 'immigrant', 'white' and later 'ethnic', their experience of these designations was mediated

through, and inseparable from, the broader economic, social and cultural transformations affecting the lived experience of everyday life in both sending and receiving societies. Thinking about the production of difference within the Irish migrant experience does not, therefore, only involve acknowledging how the boundaries of Irish ethnicity have been contested and redrawn over time; it involves too consideration of how individuals negotiate the particularities of migrant 'journeys', fashioning and refashioning competing versions of self at different moments in the life cycle, through articulation with a variegated and constantly changing discursive environment.[44]

Taken collectively, these various points suggest a more fundamental concern with the academic discourse that has emerged out of ethnic mobilisation. For although much of this discourse has consistently employed the vocabulary of 'construction' and 'difference' when talking about Irish 'identity', the habitual omission of the dynamics outlined above suggests that interest in how Irish subjectivities have been constructed and remade historically is in practice limited. As Stuart Hall has emphasised:

> Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, power.[45]

In the Irish case, however, the imperative of ethnic 'visibility' appears to have encouraged representations of 'identity' as 'an already accomplished fact'.[46] Just as the assimilationists tacitly assumed their 'whiteness' made the Irish suitable candidates for the assimilation paradigm, such that certain behavioural trends were automatically read as expressions of a pregiven 'white' identity, so claims about the 'invisibility' of the Irish take for granted that a coherent, unproblematic Irish 'identity' is always already *there*, primed to become outwardly 'visible'. Instead of treating 'identity' as a category to be historicised, interrogated and deconstructed, it is implicitly conceived as a property which individuals 'have', whose ontological *existence* precedes its expression in speech and behaviour. The point is not that Irish experiences are indistinct from those of the 'native' population, or that these experiences have not been subject to ideological exclusion; it is, rather, that the optical rhetoric of 'invisibility' tends to naturalise 'identity', discouraging its problematisation as an unstable, incomplete and internally riven historical *production*. Ultimately, the tendency to treat 'identity' as a normative ideal within official ontologies of the multicultural society contributes to its reification, impeding understanding of how the 'I' is formed dynamically in and through the migration process. As anthropologist Richard Jenkins has stressed, however, ethnic selfhood is intrinsically processual and performative:

> Although we talk about them in these terms endlessly, neither culture
> nor ethnicity is 'something' that people 'have', or, indeed, to which they
> 'belong'. They are, rather, complex repertoires which people experi-
> ence, use, learn and 'do' in their daily lives, with which they construct
> an ongoing sense of themselves and an understanding of their fellows.[47]

It is these repertoires, as sites where migrant subjectivities are formed
through the reciprocal workings of emotion and social narrative, which
this book seeks to investigate. Such an investigation presupposes access
to the lives of Irish migrants who settled in England during the post-war
period, and to a methodology suited to exploring the dialogic constitu-
tion of subjectivities. To that end, we turn to a discussion of oral history,
the chief methodology deployed in this book.

Oral history, migration and the 'turn to memory'

> It is the task of those who deal with history rather than chronicles to
> study, not only the mechanics of the material event, but the events of
> the remembering and the telling – the patterns of the remembering
> and the forms of the telling – through which we are able to perceive the
> 'event' in the first place.[48]

In the second half of the twentieth century oral history became a key
methodology for scholars researching social groups whose experiences
have been neglected within traditional archival sources. Along with
scholars of the experiences of women, the working classes and colonised
peoples, historians of migration have been to the fore in this trend.[49] As
the oral historian Alistair Thomson has observed, 'a central and abiding
claim of oral historians of migration has been that the migrant's own
story is likely to be unrecorded or ill-documented, and that oral evi-
dence provides an essential record of the hidden history of migration'.[50]
In the case of Irish migrants in twentieth-century Britain, oral history has
thus provided an important means of contesting Irish 'invisibility' and
authenticating claims about identity. The process of ethnic mobilisation
described above stimulated and utilised the products of a rash of oral
history projects conducted by community activists and academics in the
1980s and 1990s, and funded by charities, local government and, in one
important instance, the Commission for Racial Equality.[51]

Frequently based on group reminiscence, many of these community-
based projects produced histories whose function was both commemora-
tive and therapeutic, a tendency which became increasingly pronounced
following the election of 'New' Labour in 1997 and the signing of the
Good Friday Agreement the following year. Others have tended to
produce histories in the mode of what Ann Laura Stoler, writing about

the study of colonialisms, has termed 'subaltern memory'. Memory in this mode is

> the medium, not the message, the access point to untold stories of the colonised. In efforts to restore a more complete memory of the colonial and struggles against it, oral histories are often invoked to counter official versions and the sovereign status they implicitly give to European epistemologies. Subaltern acts of remembering have not been in question, because it is the official memory that is on the line; the process of remembering and the fashioning of personal memories are often beside the political points being made – and may in fact be seen to work against them.[52]

Virtually all book-length oral histories of the Irish in Britain published in the last 35 years have used oral narrative to gain access to 'untold stories' about the experiences of the Irish in twentieth-century Britain.[53] Against an official myth of white homogeneity and historiographical assumptions about 'assimilation', these stories often recover experiences of disadvantage and discrimination, as well as evidence of the persistence of an authentic Irish identity. Within this mode of memory, oral narrative thus functions as the medium via which an Irish voice muted through incorporation becomes audible, and which makes visible an Irish ethnic community within Britain's multicultural landscape.

As Thomson notes, the distinctive contribution of oral history in this mode concerns the agency it makes possible for individuals and groups previously written out of history. Through 'recovery' history, 'working-class men and women, indigenous peoples or members of cultural minorities … have inscribed their experiences on the historical record and offered their own interpretations of history'.[54] Yet as Stoler suggests, such histories also tend to neglect 'the process of remembering and the fashioning of personal memories'. In the case of the Irish in Britain, while interviews with Irish migrants have allowed for the accumulation of rich personal data on the lives of Irish people in modern Britain, most oral history projects neglect their status as sites of memory, productive of narratives of experience whose form is shaped by the wider cultural and political context of the 1980s and 1990s and the goals of the activist-researchers involved. More generally, as a result of the way 'recovery' approaches have been allied to collective notions of ethnicity, the specificity of individual migrant journeys has usually been subordinated to narratives of collective experience, such that memory has not registered as a source of historical evidence in its own right. Absent from studies of the Irish in modern Britain are investigations of how processes of autobiographical and collective remembering interact over the migrant life course, leaving unaddressed the issues of conflict, plurality and

long-term psychic adaption seen as inherent in recent theorisations of memory production.[55]

These absences have in part been underwritten by a particular reading of the relation between the subject and social context: if memory here functions as a medium through which a muted Irish voice becomes audible, this medium is conceived as transparent. The 'recovery' of 'invisible' experience implicitly assigns personal narrative the status of an unmediated reflection of an objective realm, or the direct expression of a pre-given 'identity' held apart from the 'distortions' of discourse and the 'rewritings' of personal and cultural memory. Such a model of social experience, however, has been one of the main casualties of the epistemological rethinking initiated as part of debates about the status of historical knowledge in the 1980s and 1990s. Post-structuralist problematisation of empiricist methodology has yielded the claim that the 'evidence of experience' is never direct in a simple, unmediated way. As Joan Scott has argued, it is not individuals who have access to an objective external reality through some looking-glass of 'experience'; rather, it is individuals who are constituted through 'experience', where 'experience' is a 'linguistic event'.[56] Margaret Somers frames this 'event' in terms of narrative: 'it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities'.[57] In short, narrative is constitutive of our experience of reality; it thus cannot be separated from it.

These points concerning discursive mediation render oral history in the 'recovery' mode inherently 'unreliable' within the frame of a correspondence theory of knowledge. If form and content are effectively inseparable, the idea of oral narrative as a repository of 'facts' about the world and self becomes untenable. On the other hand, they also point to new possibilities for the study of migrant subjectivity. If migrants make sense of their experiences through locating themselves as the subjects of narratives drawn and adapted from collective repertoires, so study of the processes of narrative self-location can yield insight into how subjectivity is shaped through culture. By focusing on how narrative subjects draw on 'the generalised subject available in discourse to construct the particular personal subject', oral narrative becomes evidence for the inter-subjective constitution of subjectivities.[58] Approached thus, personal narratives of migration potentially supply access to a dynamic often neglected within migration histories: migrants' constitutive dialogues with the different discursive environments they inhabit as part of the migration process.

In order to exploit fully the possibilities opened by this notion of narrative inter-subjectivity, theorists of oral history have brought it into relation with a view of memory as psychically active, subject to reworking and shaped constantly by wider processes of collective and public myth.

A key concept here, developed by the Popular Memory Group, is that of 'composure':

> Composure is an aptly ambiguous term to describe the process of memory making. In one sense we compose or construct memories using the public languages and meanings of our culture. In another sense we compose memories that help us to feel relatively comfortable with our lives and identities, that give us a feeling of composure.[59]

If 'experience' does not occur outside of language, neither then does 'memory'. Autobiographical remembering is not a passive process of retrieval, whereby copies of prior experience are brought before the mind, but a creative and interpretative act through which experiences are selectively reconstructed through the process of recall. Crucially, this process of interpretative reconstruction is informed by the emotional needs and desires of the subject engaged in the act of telling. The act of composing a story about one's life is shaped by a desire to form a unified and integrated whole from the different and potentially conflicting parts of the self, to achieve a sense of 'psychic integration'. Integration here encompasses a crucial temporal dimension: the act of narrating a history of the self's experiences over time involves an attempt to synthesise past and present, to make the experiences of the past acceptable to the self situated in the present, in order to promote a sense of subjective continuity, security and well-being. Simultaneously, however, this integration of past and present also occurs in relation to a need for social recognition focused on various real and imagined audiences. Composing past and present is never a private act, governed solely by a personal need for subjective continuity; it is also conditioned by subjects' need to belong and feel understood within a range of external publics, local and particular, national and general. In this sense, memory composure is an inherently social process, shaped (and limited) by the norms, ideals and prohibitions embedded within wider narratives of collective self-understanding.[60]

In turn, since social collectivities change over time, so too do the possibilities for self-understanding available within them. A third useful concept for understanding the production of cultural myth is that of the 'cultural circuit'. According to this formulation, the relationship between consumers and producers of culture forms is not one-way, but is better approached in terms of reciprocity, via circuits of discursive production. Within such circuits, stories and images constructed by groups and individuals at one location, situated at the local and private, may be appropriated for particular purposes by groups or institutions situated at the national and public levels. Over time, and under the influence of diverse social forces, the 'original' stories are reworked and generalised for distribution to a wider, typically mass, audience, at which point they become available once more for personal consumption in reshaped

form. What memory theorists have emphasised about this process is its adaptive and power-laden character, not only in the sense that a politics necessarily underpins the question of whose stories gain access to a public audience and in what form, but in the sense that widely distributed generalised forms powerfully shape and reshape the possibilities for private memory production.

The circuit gives groups and institutions with particular interests and agendas a powerful role in forming collective memory and public norms, a process which inevitably affects how individuals reconstruct and understand their own pasts, even as they engage actively in interpreting and reworking those pasts. Sometimes, the subject-positions the circuit makes available for self-understanding and expression are not universally accessible: personal experience often conflicts with the interpretation of the past projected through public memory.[61] In such instances, if personal experiences cannot be made to fit with dominant meanings and an alternative mode of expression cannot be located or formulated, the voice of personal experience becomes 'muted'.[62]

On the other hand, it is important not to see public memory merely as something imposed upon ordinary people 'from above', but as a process individuals and communities contribute to and take from. If ordinary people have been excluded from the means of cultural representation in the past, the twentieth century has witnessed an explosion of discursive activity around the personal and the everyday, as part of which the voice of personal experience has been fetishised as a sign of authenticity within Western culture. While this process necessarily enacts its own exclusions, distortions and appropriations, the development of a 'public culture of self-divulgence' has nevertheless fostered intense societal interest in the elicitation, recording and consumption of personal experiences and histories across a range of fields and media.[63] Arguably, the contemporary landscape of popular memory has become more storied and differentiated, marking the development of an increasingly complex 'narrative ecology' within post-war English society: official and public narratives must increasingly contend with, and adapt themselves to, self-representational practices generated 'from below', signalling an epochal tightening of the circuit between personal experience and public re-presentation.[64]

With respect to the wider historiography on British migration, these points caution against framing questions about migrant memory in dichotomous terms. It is certainly true that the inclusion of migrant histories within dominant myths of the British nation has been a fraught and selective process. Where some groups have been feted as 'model minorities', others have been subject to racism and xenophobia, the extent and effects of which have been actively erased from British cultural memory. In such instances, where there is active resistance to

acknowledging histories of persecution, memory may take the form of a struggle against national forgetting and disavowal, locking minority and dominant memory into a relation of contest and opposition.

At the same time, however, memory production may also be related to other aspects of the migration process and the possibilities contemporary practices of self-representation offer for their negotiation. Collective self-narration may be motivated, for example, by a need to preserve emotional connections to a homeland, but in a way that simultaneously enables adaption to the demands and possibilities of the 'here and now'. Via diverse forms of transnational communication, and in particular diaspora newspapers, circuits of transmission articulate *between* places and *across* national borders, as well as 'vertically' between personal and public levels of representation within national space. In turn, these transnational processes intersect with circuits of production operative *within* the 'particular public' of settled migrant communities.[65] In particular, representations of communal identity may reflect the cultural hegemony of particular interests and value alignments within the community, expressing, naturalising and preserving the personal experiences of some migrants at the expense of others.

Perhaps most significantly, memory production may reflect a need to record and commemorate the personal and collective achievements of the migration journey in a rapidly changing world where spatial dispersal, increasing individualisation and inter-generational forgetting militate against the reproduction of embodied communities. Under the conditions of 'liquid modernity', memory practices are triggered, not so much by a sense of injustice or desire to contest the silences of national memory, as by a sense of loss and communal withering attendant upon cultural change and generational ageing.[66] In this mode, the generalising processes inherent to the cultural circuit evolve towards a retrospective recycling of aspects of the past from which an affirmative image of settlement can be fashioned and a sense of belonging to an 'imagined community' extended.

These various points have a particular salience for the development of Irish communal memory in post-1945 England. If the Troubles formed one important context for the incitement of collective memory practices, the conflict occurred against the backdrop of wider debates over multiculturalism and national identity in Britain, as part of which the 'contribution' of immigration to 'rebuilding Britain' after the war surfaced as a focus of popular memory. More so than for many other post-war groups, this context has supplied considerable opportunities for Irish bodies across England to foster commemorative activities. Where the network of centres, clubs and associations established by post-war migrants has long served as a context for the performance of a semi-official code of Irish respectability, in recent times these spaces have also become focal points for community history projects and exhibitions, reminiscence groups and book launches, dedicated to the preservation and display of the achievements

of the post-war generation.[67] Instead of a story of discrimination and disadvantage, these histories portray a heroic narrative of hardship, endurance and success, reflecting the emotional needs of an ageing and spatially dispersed post-war generation, as well as the continuing hegemony of post-war migrant values in defining the usability of the past.

In theorising remembering as an act of interpretative reconstruction, underpinned by a need for subjective coherence, these concepts of 'composure' and the 'cultural circuit' thus address squarely earlier criticisms of oral history centring on the 'unreliability' of memory. By suggesting that we read the integration of narrative forms as a kind of metaphor for an interior process of subjective integration, where this process is conditioned by sets of overlapping dialogues playing out against broader cycles of cultural production, composure transforms the subject's tendency to rewrite past experience into a resource. Inaccuracies, tendencies towards forgetting and occlusion, exaggeration and fictionalisation, become evidence of the reworking of subjectivities over time through dynamic interaction with a social environment in which the forms of public memory are themselves being recycled and reworked in particular ways.

As this suggests, change is not solely explainable in terms of culture. By stressing the importance of the subject's need for internal coherence as a structuring dynamic of narrative production, composure draws our attention to a crucial psychic dimension in social life, alongside the stress on discourse. As Michael Roper suggests:

> What emerges from this kind of approach is a sense of subjectivity, not as wholly composed by ideological formations – competing, contradictory or otherwise – but as a matter of personality formed through lived experience and the emotional responses to those experiences. A biographical perspective allows us to see the assimilation of cultural codes as a matter of negotiation involving an active subject … [and] … as a selective and partial process, never complete, and always partly dependent on earlier experience.[68]

Experience is not only a 'linguistic event'; it is a psychic one too. Discourse supplies the terms within which thought and action are formulated, but formulation is also an active negotiation whereby subjects, apprehending the world through the 'screen' of their own emotions, invest differently in the forms available. It is thus necessary to conceive of the subject, not only as discursively constituted, but as a subject of desire.

Informed by the framework developed by the cultural historian Graham Dawson, this book makes use of Kleinian formulations to further delineate the role of desire within the theory of memory outlined above. Where this discussion has made reference to the subject's need for 'integration' as a structuring principle of memory, Kleinian thought further emphasises the particularity of lived relationships as the context

in which an integrated sense of self evolves dynamically in relation to the external world. In particular, the emotions and desires which constitute the subject's internal psychic landscape are powerfully shaped by the ways in which basic psychic needs and impulses are accommodated or denied by significant others (especially parental figures), and by how subjects handle and assimilate these responses in turn. The external world here supplies the 'external objects' from which 'internal phantasy objects' are developed, while forming a site on to which desires and anxieties associated with these internal objects are projected in turn.[69] Subject-formation within a Kleinian framework is thus an ongoing process of exchange between internal and external worlds, whereby internal phantasy objects ('imagos') are constituted, broken apart and split off through alternating processes of introjection (by which the self incorporates external objects into its internal phantasy world) and projection (by which it expels or projects internal feelings or impulses into the social world).[70]

As this suggests, Kleinian thought places emphasis on the reciprocity of emotion and culture in subject-formation. If the external objects from which the subject's internal phantasy world is developed are embedded within the concrete practices of everyday life, so the codes and values which regulate social relations are centrally implicated in the shaping of personal emotions and desires. In turn, these personal subjectivities condition how individuals adapt and adapt to the constraints and possibilities of social life. In terms of the positioning effects of discourse, to say that the 'assimilation of cultural codes' is 'a matter of negotiation involving an active subject' is to say that how subjects invest in their discursive environments (the forms they select and how they interpret and make use of them) is conditioned by desires, impulses and beliefs formed through previous interactions between the psychic and the social. The subject-in-formation is thus 'always partial, never complete' in that it is constantly being added to and split, reordered and subdivided in a ceaseless bid to form a coherent whole through interaction with its environment.

It thus follows that subject-formation is a necessarily *ambivalent* process, where different parts of the self exist in conflict, and where unsettling emotions pose an ongoing threat to psychic stability. While, for Klein, this ambivalence originates in the early splitting of the subject in response to its own inborn self-destructive urges, the internal division of the self becomes more complex as the relationship between the developing ego and its internal objects evolves.[71] As Dawson explains, the diverse and fragmentary quality of the identifications established via these relations engenders 'incompatibility', leading to 'psychic conflict'. In the Kleinian account psychic life is thus conceived as a 'continual struggle, unconscious in the first instance, for a narrative phantasy capable of reconciling conflict and subsuming difference'. Narrative reconciliation,

however, constantly negotiates a countervailing tendency towards defensive 'splitting':

> Chief among the factors that provoke splitting of the self and its imagos are the disintegrating effects of anxiety and the defences developed in self-protection against it. These 'ego defences' work to prevent anxiety from undermining the self by containing it within a limited zone of the psyche. 'Resistances' are established between anxiety-producing and anxiety-free imagos (and thus, also, between parts of the psyche) resulting in the 'different identifications becoming cut off from one another'. The self's defences against anxiety therefore produce narrative phantasies that exacerbate the existing fragmentation of the internal world: splitting interferes with more inclusive processes of integration, and ensures further psychic conflict will occur.[72]

Oral narratives of experience do not just register 'the self'; they register the self as a *divided* formation, where unconscious desires constantly suffuse and condition conscious self-presentations. As well as the desire for coherence and integration, this also includes the work of psychic defences engaged in the management of fears and anxieties. The importance of this here is that the 'identities' which migrants articulate need to be seen as the unstable outcome of psychic conflicts which both originate in past experience and, under the conditions of the present, exercise an influence over how that past can be represented to the self. The implication is that, as well as reading for coherence, it is necessary also to read for conflict and the events which occasion it. This underscores the point that the self is an accretion of past experience, the unresolved conflicts of which influence memory production; the prism of the present cannot be easily separated from the enduring significance of people and places in one's past. But it also opens a window onto the phenomenon of subjective change over the life course: the psychic conflicts present within migrants' narratives are not only records of the subjective impact of difficult aspects of the migration journey; they are records too of adaption to these pressures, of the reworking of the self and formation of new identifications in pursuance of the goals of settlement.

Lastly, one final kind of dialogue affecting the production of memory within the interview concerns the interview relation itself. As Summerfield states:

> The process of the production of memory stories is always dialogic or inter-subjective in the sense that it is the product of a relationship between a narrator and a recipient subject, an audience.[73]

As noted above, this 'audience' may be constituted in the abstract, as a particular public shaping the interview from outside, but 'audience' also

refers to the dynamics obtaining within the interview itself. The narrative produced is always shaped by a relation between how the interviewer attempts to structure the interview, and how the interviewee interprets the interview situation, including the overarching goals of the interaction and the identities of the interviewer. In terms of the research on which this book is based, a number of aspects of my own autobiography are important here. My own migration to Glasgow in 2002 not only sparked my initial interest in the Irish in Britain, but stimulated too a theoretical interest in issues relating to 'identity', an interest subsequently developed through my chosen undergraduate programmes of study in philosophy and social history. In terms of the current project, this was to translate into a preference for frameworks and methodologies orientated towards the study of 'interiorities'. Interviews were 'semi-structured' in that they were based on a schedule of questions informed by the research goals of the project and my reading of the historiography, yet were approached in such a way as to encourage respondents to talk about what most interested them, even if this did not appear at the time to correspond to pre-defined themes. Interview strategy was based on trying to elicit memories rich in emotion rather than external 'fact', using both negative and positive techniques. As well as trying to appear non-threatening and deferential, so as to put subjects at their ease, I tried to ask questions that encouraged story-telling by focusing on contextual details and personal feelings rather than the abstract issues that lay behind the questions. In this way, I sought to prompt respondents to talk about what was most meaningful to them about their lives as migrants.

Finally, how subjects constructed themselves within the interview was also conditioned by how they perceived and identified me. In this respect, the production of memory was affected by the various visual and aural markers of social identity I carried into the interview situation. At the time the interviews were carried out I was a student researcher, aged between 25 and 27, based at the University of Manchester. In addition, I was male, white and, significantly, spoke with a Northern Irish accent. Thus, while some respondents identified me with the institution of the university, others focused on my accent, prompting questions and discussion about Northern Ireland and Ireland more generally. As we shall see, in some instances the influence of this dynamic was particularly marked, inciting and shaping memory production in relation to themes connected with Northern Irish politics.

Myth, memory and migrant life stories: key themes and dynamics

At stake in debates over the development of Irish identities in Britain is the characterisation of the British–Irish relationship itself. As such,

the migrant experience forms a lens through which to read the changing significance of this relationship and its overlooked social and cultural effects. Additionally, however, migrants also participated in the making of this relationship, shaping the everyday contexts and discourses in which British–Irish difference became meaningful. This book shifts attention from 'Irish identity' as a reified collectivity to what Paul Gilroy terms 'the always unpredictable mechanisms of identification'; it foregrounds how migrants encountered, internalised and transformed the various subject-positions they were assigned within post-war English and Irish societies.[74] In so doing, it shows how the post-war Irish experience resists simple incorporation within an assimilation/collective identity dichotomy. The Irish did not 'assimilate' effortlessly into the background of English cultural life, but nor were migrants 'members' of a bounded ethnic group, the boundaries of which were sharply defined against an oppositional discourse of Englishness. Examined from the perspective of individual lives, the liminal position which migrants negotiated in post-war England was dynamic: migrants located themselves as the subjects of a diverse and historically evolving repertoire of narratives, signalling adaption, difference and integration as co-articulating features of the post-war migrant experience.

This broad agenda is developed via a focus on the dynamics of memory production, concerning three principal aspects. Firstly, focusing on key 'episodic' moments in individual and collective memory of the migration journey, chapters identify important *lieux de mémoire* in the formation of a distinctive post-war Irish communal memory, centring on the lived contexts of migration. Focused on the context of departure, Chapter 1 addresses experiences of leaving home after 1945. Chapter 2, addressing the 'liminal' phase between arrival and 'settlement', examines women's negotiation of femininities in the post-war English city. Chapter 3, focused on experiences of work, explores the construction of Irish masculinities in the post-war construction industry. Chapter 4 investigates migrants' changing attitudes to religion, marriage and the Catholic Church. And Chapter 5 addresses experiences of difference and otherness through the lens of the Troubles in England. Employing the notion of the 'cultural circuit', each chapter explores how lived experiences of these everyday contexts have been generalised within diverse forms of representation, and in turn, how these representations become 'useable pasts' for both individuals and groups. The book is thus concerned with how the lived experiences of migration have been condensed into a set of popular myths of Irish settlement in post-war England, and with interrogating the relationship between these myths and the versions of Irish experience projected within academic historiography; more particularly, it is concerned with how personal reconstructions of migrant experience are mediated through such myths, such that the historical

reworking of dominant settlement myths necessarily redefines the pos-
sibilities for personal remembering at different moments in the life
course.

Secondly, as this focus on the routing of popular memory back into
autobiographical remembering here implies, chapters pay special theor-
etical attention to the functions of collective myth at the level of personal
memory production: to the differentiated and psychically active ways
individual migrants interact with communal and public myths as they
endeavour to 'compose' 'settled' versions of self. While the production of
an Irish communal memory in post-war England was organised around
common sites of memory, these were sites of plurality and contest as
much as they were repositories of shared meaning. There was never only
one collective memory of post-war settlement, but a mosaic of com-
peting narratives of experience, each of which interpreted the meaning
of Irish settlement and identity in different, often contradictory, ways.
At the core of the book are the 'expressive possibilities' this complex and
shifting memory formation makes available for self-understanding and
the distinctive ways individual migrants manipulate and exploit these
possibilities, in response to the specific circumstances structuring their
experiences and the psychic desires these engender. Rather than the
'fit' between personal reconstructions and a definite scheme of migrant
'scripts', the book thus foregrounds how migrants negotiate the tensions
between multiple subject-positions inscribed within a diverse reper-
toire of available narratives, selecting and adapting available formulas in
an effort to 'compose' a version of past experience which validates the
migration journey.

Finally, this concern with the 'composure' of migrant memories is also
mobilised to explore the dynamics of subjective change over the course
of the migration journey, at both individual and collective levels. Where
existing approaches to the use of oral history tend to abstract segments of
migrants' narratives from the overall story of migration in which they are
embedded, each chapter is based on in-depth analysis and comparison of
a small number of migrant life histories, wherein particular themes are
explored within the context of the individual life narrative as a whole.[75] In
this way, subjects' representation of significant features of the migration
journey are understood in terms of the subjective legacies of prior events
and experience, as well as in terms of the narrator's standpoint and emo-
tional needs in the present. As such, this focus on the interaction between
part and whole affords a means of analysing the dynamic relationship
between past and present, 'there' and 'here', within migrants' narratives
of settlement. Through investigation of how versions of past experience
have been 'rewritten' at different points in the migration journey, and
by analysing the dynamic relationship between these 'rewritings' and
wider shifts in popular myth, chapters trace how understandings of self
have been renegotiated through psychic adaption to the pressures and

possibilities of settlement, whilst simultaneously illuminating the changing contours of Irish collective memory since 1945.

As these points imply, the approach taken here does not offer a quantitative solution to the problem of representivity. Chapters examine ten case histories in depth, drawn from and supported by a wider sample of 45 oral histories, migrant diaries, autobiographies and memoirs.[76] However, while the lives of these migrants share some basic features in common (they all left the south of Ireland for England between 1945 and 1969) they are different in countless other respects.[77] Individual narratives have been selected, not because they reflect some notion of 'the average' Irish migrant experience, but because of what their comparison reveals about the underlying dynamics of migrant subjectivity, dynamics not graspable through the compilation of a collective profile. In this regard, while a focus on individual migrant trajectories points up the specificity of individual experiences, by holding the interrelation between self and society in constant play it becomes possible to analyse how difference is shaped through shared 'horizons of possibility', as well as to illustrate the processes by which such horizons are reinterpreted and transformed in the course of individual life experiences. Within this conception, generalisability does not depend upon the weighting of samples or enumerating the characteristics of a pre-defined group, but upon generating critical insight into the shifting relations between the self and the social under particular historical conditions. Oral history in this mode is thus concerned with a different kind of representivity. As Alessandro Portelli puts it:

> Oral history … offers less a grid of standard experiences than a horizon of shared possibilities, real or imagined. The fact that these possibilities are hardly ever organised in tight, coherent patterns indicates that each person entertains, in each moment, multiple possible destinies, perceives different possibilities, and makes different choices from others in the same situation. These myriad individual differences, however, only serve to remind us that, beyond the necessary abstraction of the social science grid, the actual world is more like a mosaic or patchwork of countless different shapes, touching, and overlapping, and sharing, but also cherishing their irreducible individuality. As sciences of the individual, oral history and literature deal with the portions of the mosaic that cannot be subsumed under the grid. They give us unwieldy representations, often harder to handle and work with, but perhaps more consistent not only with the presence of subjectivity but also with the objective reality of things.[78]

The interviewees in this sample came from different places in Ireland; they moved at different times between 1945 and 1969; they settled (and resettled) in different places, at different times; they did different jobs, married different people and lived different individual lives in multiple

ways. However, what they share is a relation to the broad experience of Irish migration to post-war England and the societal discourses and historical forces which shaped this experience; their lives, in different and specific ways, are representative of this experience, and of the realities of difference within it. We turn now to the empirical analysis of such issues, beginning in post-war Ireland.

Notes

1 R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (London, 1971), 22–23.
2 The locus classicus of the 'outcast' thesis is J. M. Werly, 'The Irish in Manchester, 1832–49', *Irish Historical Studies* 18:71 (1973), 345–358. More generally, see the contributions to R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in the Victorian City* (London, 1985), and esp. M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Problems of Integration', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 31 (1981), 149–173; and F. Finnegan, *Poverty and Prejudice: A Study of Irish Immigrants in York, 1840–1875* (Cork, 1982).
3 On the origins and popularisation of Victorian images of the Irish ghetto see D. MacRaild, 'Irish Immigration and the "Condition of England" Question: The Roots of an Historiographical Tradition', *Immigrants and Minorities* 14:1 (1995), 67–85.
4 D. Fitzpatrick, 'A Curious Middle Place: The Irish in Britain, 1871–1921', in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Britain, 1815–1939* (London, 1989), 10–59; J. Walvin, *Passage to Britain: Immigration in British History and Politics* (Harmondsworth, 1984), 59.
5 For revisionist accounts emphasising variation, change gradual assimilation see the contributions to Swift and Gilley, *The Irish in Britain, 1815–1939*, in particular Fitzpatrick, 'A Curious Middle Place'. See also J. Hutchinson and A. O'Day, 'The Gaelic Revival in London, 1900–22: Limits of Ethnic Identity', in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension* (Dublin, 1999), 254–276; and P. O'Leary, 'From the Cradle to the Grave: Popular Catholicism among the Irish in Wales', in P. O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide*, vol. 5: *Religion and Identity* (Leicester, 1996), 183–195. For revisionist accounts which give more weight to the notion of an enduring Irish communal identity see M. Busteed, *The Irish in Manchester c. 1750–1921. Resistance, Adaption and Identity* (Manchester, 2016) and J. Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse* (Liverpool, 2007).
6 R. Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940–2000* (London, 2002), 145.
7 D. H. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Belfast, 1993), 211. British scholars, both quantitative sociologists and social historians, have likewise stressed the easy assimilability of the Irish during the post-1945 period. See M. P. Hornsby-Smith, *Roman Catholics in England: Studies in Social Structure since the Second World War* (Cambridge, 1987); M. P. Hornsby-Smith and A. Dale, 'The Assimilation of Irish Immigrants in England', *British Journal of Sociology* 39:4 (1988), 519–544; J. Rex, 'Immigrants and British Labour: The