THE IRISH IN POST-WAR BRITAIN: TOWARDS GREATER VISIBILITY?

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Introduction

The Irish in Great Britain in the post-World War II period have received limited recognition with regard to monitoring, research, and policymaking at both central and local government level compared with other ethnic minorities. This article proposes to examine whether an Irish dimension is included or excluded at local government level in monitoring procedures and policy initiatives and the factors affecting this. This will be done through an analysis of the preliminary results of interviews carried out in a selection of London boroughs.

Firstly, this article will trace how the Irish migrant generation went from a largely "invisible" minority in post-World War II Britain to a certain level of assertiveness, finally becoming recognised in the 2001 British census under the "Ethnic Group" category. It has been argued that the invisibility of the Irish has been one of the key reasons why an Irish dimension in monitoring and policy has been largely absent (Hickman & Walter 7). Both this invisibility and exclusion from the "Ethnic Group" category of the census, when it was introduced in 1991, effectively meant that the Irish were excluded from many policy initiatives aimed at minorities in Britain. While thousands of Irish migrants have successfully integrated into British professional and cultural life, research has consistently shown that sectors of the Irish community are over-represented against indicators of disadvantage.

Secondly, the results of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) report will be analysed. The authors, Professors Mary Hickman and Bronwen Walter, sent out questionnaires in the early 1990s to local authorities to find out to what extent an Irish dimension was included in monitoring (Hickman & Walter 63). During the 1980s, and more especially the 1990s, the Irish became much more visible, but it was only in 1997 that this important piece of research was published. This report showed there was indeed a need for monitoring of the Irish in order to combat the difficulty that some section of this population was experiencing and brought the Irish issue of discrimination and disadvantage into the national arena. A brief analysis of these results will be given to show where the Irish were situated at local government level at this time with a special emphasis on the London area, where a third of the Irish population in Britain lives.

Thirdly, the preliminary results of interviews that were carried out with officials in a selection of London boroughs will be discussed.[1] The aim was to determine devel-

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1   Each respondent signed a consent form, but in order to respect privacy the names of the interviewees in each borough will not be cited.

opments since the publication of the CRE report in relation to monitoring for the Irish community and to find out what the driving force behind this monitoring at local government level was. The specific reasons for inclusion or exclusion of an Irish category at this level were not detailed in the CRE report. The results of these interviews also aimed at determining the influence of, firstly, the recent inclusion of "Irish" under the "Ethnic Group" category in the 2001 census and, secondly, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.[2]

Methodology

Interviews in a selection of London boroughs, eight in total, were carried out over a two-month period (see Table 1). These interviews were with members of Equality and Diversity Units and, where this unit was not in operation, with the Chief Executive and Director of Administration. These boroughs hold 28.5% of the Irish population in London according to the results of the 2001 census (Table KS06: Ethnic Group). A cross-section of boroughs with both large and small Irish populations and boroughs that had not included an Irish dimension in their monitoring systems at the time of the CRE report were chosen. In addition, some of the boroughs had an Irish voluntary organisation present and some did not. This cross-section was selected to increase the reliability of the information produced. The interviews were structured and the questions were prepared with the help of a member of the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister, the central government department that is responsible for policy concerning local authorities in Britain.

From Exclusion to Inclusion?

When the Irish government withdrew from the Commonwealth and declared a Republic in 1949, Irish citizens were still to be treated with the same rights as British citizens under the *Ireland Act 1949* (Lee 300)*.* This gave them a special status in Britain even though the country was no longer a member of the Commonwealth and meant that the Irish could still continue to supply labour on the British market.

The British government introduced legislation, the *1962 Commonwealth Immigration Bill,* to control the influx of immigrants from Commonwealth countries who came to Britain, like the Irish, to participate in the post-war reconstruction boom (Hickman, "'Binary Opposites'" 55). The government excluded the Irish on the ground that it was impossible to police the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic (Hickman, "Reconstructing" 299). In addition, the Irish were needed to meet the demand for un-

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2   The Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 was the government's response to the recommendations made in the Stephen Lawrence inquiry report. It amends and strengthens the 1976 Race Relations Act, so, for the first time ever, councils are prohibited from unlawfully discriminating in any of their functions. This places a general duty on councils to promote racial equality and, now, all local authorities must publicly demonstrate their awareness and commitment to race equality regardless of the size or the make-up of their workforce or local community.

skilled labour and were preferable to Commonwealth immigrants, as it was thought they would integrate much easier, sharing the same skin colour and language (Hickman, "'Binary Opposites'" 55).

Since the *Immigration Act 1971,* Ireland has been part of the Common Travel Area. Irish citizens have not been subject to control, and under the *British Nationality Act 1981* nationals of the Republic of Ireland have "settled status" without restrictions on length of stay (Central Office, *Immigration* 13). The Irish were not to be treated "any differently than British citizens" and could travel to and from Britain without hindrance. This is very significant because the *exclusion* of the Irish from controls on entry and Ireland's special status with the United Kingdom directly contributed to the subsequent *invisibility* of the Irish in British society (Hickman, "Reconstructing" 289).

They were constructed as the "same" as the British and they were excluded from the restrictive immigration legislation which came to determine which groups were defined as "ethnic" and, therefore, different from the mainstream population. The non-inclusion of the Irish here also meant that an Irish dimension was subsequently ignored in debates surrounding harmonious race relations (Hickman, "Reconstructing" 289). However, it must not be forgotten either that the discourse of immigration in British society became increasingly racialised from the riots of 1958 through to the 1960s.

When discrimination and racism against immigrants became officially recognised, legislation was introduced to combat this. The *1976 Race Relations Act* defines discrimination on racial grounds as being on grounds of "*colour, race, nationality or ethnic and national origins*" (Central Office, *Race Relations* 6). The definition of a racial group to include ethnic or national origins obviously includes the Irish. Nevertheless, even though the legal framework was present to include the Irish, they were not automatically recognised in official discourse as a distinct ethnic minority group subject to racism and discrimination like the "visible" minorities. Yet, they remained silent and kept a low profile. The "Troubles" in Northern Ireland and the association in British mindsets between Irish and terrorist may also have prevented them from openly asserting their rights (Hickman & Walter 127).

The 1980s was a period of change in British society for immigrants when "ethnic minority groups" largely replaced the term "migrants." Ethnic minorities included both the migrant generation and the second and subsequent generations. Change began to occur also at this time for the Irish, especially in London. The Greater London Council (GLC) recognised the problems that the Irish community could encounter. This recognition was in no small part due to both the work of Ken Livingstone, fervent advocate of the Irish and the leader of the GLC at this time, and the campaigning of the Deputy Leader, John McDonnell. The GLC published a policy report on the Irish community in the early 1980s. This was significant as the GLC acknowledged the importance for more funding for Irish community needs. It concluded that the Irish

community was disadvantaged in many areas such as housing, employment, and mental health (GLC 6-8).

The GLC was abolished in 1986, under the Thatcher Government, before significant progress could be made but this period marks the point of departure for a more open articulation of an Irish identity in British society. Following its abolition, the onus was then on the local authorities to include an Irish dimension in ethnic monitoring procedures. The CRE's statutory "Race Relations Code of Practice" (1984) for the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity in employment called for the use of monitoring recording the ethnic origin of individuals (Hickman & Walter 63). However, because of the overwhelming association of ethnicity and blackness in Britain, the Irish were not automatically included in ethnic monitoring procedures.

The Results of the CRE Report

The authors of the CRE report carried out a postal survey in 1994 contacting 514 local authorities in England, Wales, and Scotland to determine whether ethnic monitoring took place and whether an Irish dimension was included or not (Hickman & Walter 64). Sixteen out of the 33 London boroughs carried out some form of ethnic monitoring which included an Irish category at this time (Hickman & Walter 64). For most of the authorities recognition came in the late 1980s and 1990s. But even when a local authority adopted the Irish monitoring category, it was often extended to only a few of the possible areas of employment and services (Hickman & Walter 64).

Only two London boroughs at that time, Brent and Southwark, claimed to monitor in all seven areas which were surveyed – personnel, housing, education, social services, environmental services, leisure and council tax benefit (Hickman & Walter 64). Nevertheless, it was also discovered that most authorities appeared to make no further use of the statistics they had gathered. One official even asked: "*WHY is IRISH to be monitored as a separate group within WHITE?"* (Hickman & Walter 67). This evidence shows that even when an Irish dimension was included in monitoring, it was not largely translated into policy initiatives, and there was incomprehension on the part of officials as to why the Irish needed to be monitored separately in the first place.

Monitoring of the Irish community is needed as Irish-born people are statistically more likely to be socially disadvantaged, experience high levels of physical and mental health problems and long-term disability and are also over-represented as users of psychiatric services (London Civic Forum 5-6). Research shows that Irish men are the only group whose life expectancy worsens on emigration to England (Greenslade 40). The 2001 census shows that 34% of the Irish population in Britain is over 60, 25.6% have a limiting long-term illness and just over 21% live in accommodation rented from the council or other social rented (other social rented includes rented from a Registered Social Landlord, Housing Association, Housing Co-operative and

Charitable Trust) (Table T33: Migration). What is an even more surprising figure is that over 37% are cited as having no qualifications or qualifications unknown (Table T33: Migration). The Irish figure also highly among homeless people, and as recently as November 2003 an offer for employment was advertised at "The Passage," a centre for the homeless based in London, for an Irish Persons Coordinator.

During interviews carried out with members of the Irish voluntary sector in London, it could be established that the level of Irish people's needs was still high even though the Irish population had gone down since the 1991 census by over 60,000 people (Owen 4). The Brent Irish Advisory Service (BIAS) sees about 2,500 people each year and the London Irish Centre about 2,000 both from the Irish migrant population and second- and third-generation Irish (Interviews O'Callaghan and Kivlehan). There is a particular problem with older Irish people who find themselves in difficulty after not having made adequate provision for their retirement. They become isolated and some finish up living in bad accommodation. Members of these organisations have also noted that a lot of younger people are coming to them, some with no accommo-dation and not enough money to get started, and others with drug- and alcohol-related problems. Therefore, there is still need amongst a certain section of the Irish in London.

Interview Results

Finally, the evolution of the situation since the publication of the CRE report and the inclusion, after much lobbying by certain sectors of the Irish community, especially the Federation of Irish Societies, for the incorporation of the Irish under the "Ethnic Group" category will be analysed. It was argued at the time that the Irish should be included under this category because there was a section experiencing disadvantage and there was a requirement for a more accurate picture of the extent of Irish need. It was also hoped that this would encourage more extensive monitoring at local gov-ernment level.

According to the 2001 census, the Irish in London form just over three per cent of the ethnic minority population (Table KS06: Ethnic Group). This places them in fifth posi-tion after the Indians, Africans, Caribbean and the Other White categories (Table KS06: Ethnic Group). The London borough which has the largest Irish population, nearly seven per cent, is Brent, followed by Islington, Hammersmith and Fulham, Eal-ing, Camden and Harrow all having a representation of over four per cent Irish in their borough (see Table 1).

The boroughs with some of the most active Irish voluntary sectors are Camden, where the London Irish Centre is based and where the Federation of Irish Societies was based until recently, Brent, where BIAS works from, and Islington, where the Action Group for Irish Youth (AGIY) and various housing associations are located, one of the principal ones being Innisfree Housing Association.

Fourteen boroughs were contacted and ten replies received and eight officials agreed to be interviewed. One borough said it could not provide information even though the Irish represent over four per cent of the population and another did not reply when a sample of the questions to be discussed were sent. Therefore, interviews were carried out in eight London boroughs and each person received a copy of the questions before the interview (see Table 1).

When asked about the size of the Irish population in their borough, every respondent got this information from the census. One respondent said the National Survey preceded everything else (Interview Haringey). All respondents monitored according to the census categories and some, but not all, even went further than this and monitored to reflect the make-up of the local community, for example, including categories such as Turkish, Somali, Kosovo.

When asked if a specific Irish category was included in ethnic monitoring systems the answers were varying. Five of the boroughs (Camden, Brent, Islington, Haringey, and Southwark) had included the Irish in their monitoring systems for many years, although monitoring was uneven between departments. The other three (Wandsworth, Havering, and Barnet) did not monitor the Irish at the time of the CRE report and had only recently included an Irish category.

A further question asked was what concrete changes or policy initiatives these data had initiated in those boroughs which had been monitoring the Irish in the past. It was difficult for the respondents to give specific answers. One official said the question was being asked at the moment concerning what to do with data and they were carrying out impact assessments (Interview Southwark). However, this borough had introduced a programme for travellers as a result of monitoring and a proportion of these travellers were of Irish origin. It was also mentioned during interviews that funding had been given to the Irish voluntary sector. It could be argued that this has the tendency to show lack of commitment in dealing with Irish need and handing over responsibility to the voluntary sector. Apart from the traveller community, none of the respondents could name any concrete changes that had come about in the last few years for the Irish in their borough. There seemed to be more concern over the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers.

Each respondent was given five choices concerning the influence on the inclusion of an Irish category in monitoring procedures: recent inclusion of "Irish" under the "Ethnic Group" category in the census, Irish voluntary sector lobbying, central government policy, the CRE report on the Irish, or other influences. The answers here varied. In the boroughs where the Irish had been included for some time answers ranged from: because we have a large Irish community, the influence of the community, Irish voluntary sector lobbying, people of Irish descent driving things forward, Irish councillors or councillors of Irish descent. For those boroughs, which had never monitored the Irish in the past and had now included this category, the clear impetus was recognition in the 2001 census under the "Ethnic Group" category.

When the three boroughs, which had not carried out monitoring of their local Irish community in the past, were asked about the role played by the CRE report, the answers varied. One respondent had heard about the launch ceremony for the report but had not attended. Another respondent had not read the report, and the third had read the report but it had had no influence on monitoring procedures, even though at that time the CRE had encouraged an Irish dimension to be included. The other respondents, in the local authorities that had included the Irish in monitoring procedures in the past, had all read or heard of the report. One respondent noted that an important aspect of this report was that it sent out a positive message showing the commitment of the CRE towards the Irish, but it does not seem however to have initiated any concrete changes with regard to policy-making (Interview Southwark).

The influence of the Race Relations Amendment Act was another area covered. Under this Act all public authorities must produce a Race Equality Scheme and revise it every three years. Most of the respondents said that the Race Equality Scheme meant no more or no less for the Irish than for other minorities. However, this Act does place a legal duty on local authorities to take racial equality into account in policy-making, service delivery and employment practices. In one borough the Irish were specifically mentioned in the Race Equality Scheme (Interview Southwark).

Conclusion

To conclude, the Irish in Britain have remained largely invisible in post-World War II British society and have been excluded from much of the research and policy-making at local government level in the past. The policy document published by the GLC in the 1980s brought Irish issues to the fore in London, even though the GLC was abolished before much progress could be made.

However, it took until the end of the 1990s to get a major piece of research out into the public arena. This publication showed that indeed Irish discrimination and disadvantage did exist for sections of the Irish community in Britain. It highlighted the lack of comprehension by officials as to why an Irish dimension should be included in monitoring practices. At the time, 48% of London boroughs monitored the Irish, but the results were, for the most part, not translated into policy initiatives. The campaign for inclusion of an "Irish" heading under the "Ethnic Group" category of the 2001 census was considered essential in getting recognition for the Irish on a national level and also to generate a clearer picture of the Irish community in Britain.

From the preliminary results of the interviews, it can be concluded that the inclusion of the Irish under this category means that authorities that use the census "Ethnic Group" category headings, which was the entire sample, now include the Irish in their monitoring procedures. This will mean that more data will be generated on the Irish in the future.

Local authorities now also have a statutory duty to promote racial equality under the Race Relations Amendment Act. However, even though more comprehensive data

will be available in the future at borough level, unless a strong Irish voluntary sector or a vocal Irish community are present to put Irish issues on the local agenda, the risk is that the data will not be used to create policy initiatives for the Irish.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Irish are present in data monitoring systems. In the boroughs where they were included before the 2001 census, this has been largely due to voluntary sector lobbying and a strong community presence. The local authorities that did not include an Irish dimension in monitoring procedures in the past have been greatly influenced by the inclusion of the Irish in the 2001 census under the "Ethnic Group" category alongside the "visible" ethnic minorities. However, since the CRE publication there has been little evidence of concrete initiatives aimed at the Irish community at local authority level in the London area, which is in keeping with the results of the CRE report. Much work remains to be done if monitoring procedures are to be translated into policy initiatives for the Irish community in the future.[3]

Table 1:

Population of "White Irish" in London Boroughs

Source: 2001 Census of England, Table KS06: Ethnic Group

Inner London

	Population	*%*
Camden*	**9,149**	**4.62**
City of London	241	3.35
Hackney	6,117	3.01
Hammersmith/Fulham	7,983	4.83
Haringey*	**9,302**	**4.29**
Islington*	**10,057**	**5.72**
Kensington/Chelsea	5,183	3.26
Lambeth	8,689	3.26
Lewisham	6,990	2.80
Newham	3,231	1.32
Southwark*	**7,674**	**3.13**
Tower Hamlets	3,823	1.94
Wandsworth*	**8,151**	**3.13**
Westminster	6,574	3.62

Outer London

	Population	*%*
Barking and Dagenham	2,753	1.67
Barnet*	**10,545**	**3.35**
Bexley	3,025	1.38
Brent*	**18,313**	**6.95**
Bromley	4,652	1.57
Croydon	7,130	2.15
Ealing	14,285	4.74
Enfield	8,398	3.06
Greenwich	4,862	2.26
Harrow	9,057	4.37
Havering*	**3,390**	**1.51**
Hillingdon	6,911	2.84
Hounslow	6,198	2.91
Kingston upon Thames	3,201	2.17
Merton	5,464	2.90
Redbridge	5,559	2.32
Richmond upon Thames	4,805	2.78
Sutton	3,664	2.03
Waltham Forest	5,112	2.34

* = local authorities where interviews took place

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