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Voices from the Shadows: Intergenerational Conflict Memory and Second-Generation Northern Irish Identity in England

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Abstract: Recent scholarship has highlighted the heterogeneity of second-generation Irish identities in Great Britain, yet the varieties of self-identification espoused by the English-raised children of Northern Irish parents remain almost wholly unexplored. This article redresses this neglect by examining the relationship between parentally transmitted memories of the Northern Ireland Troubles (*c.*1969–1998) and the forms of identity and self-understanding that such children develop during their lives in England. Drawing on original oral history testimony and using the concepts of narrative inheritance and postmemory as interpretive tools, it demonstrates the complex correlation that exists between parents' diverse approaches to memory-sharing and their children's negotiation of inherited conflict memory as they position themselves discursively within contemporary English society. Based on a close reading of five oral history interviews, the analysis reveals a spectrum of creative postmemory practices and identity enactments, whereby narrators agentively define themselves in relation to the meanings they attribute to inherited memories, or the dearth thereof, as they navigate their tangled transnational affinities and allegiances. The article also explores how these practices and enactments are subtly responsive to narrators' changing relationships to their narrative inheritances as their experience and awareness of their own and their parents' lives deepen over the life course.

Keywords: Northern Ireland Troubles; England; conflict; migration; identity; second generation; intergenerational memory; postmemory; narrative inheritance

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1. Introduction

Since its emergence as a research field in the 1990s, one of the most significant developments within Irish diaspora studies has been the gradual burgeoning of empirical and analytical research on the history, culture, identities and lived experiences of Irish migrants and their descendants in British society. Where once there was a rather myopic view of the Irish in Britain as an undifferentiated social entity, there now exists an extensive corpus of scholarship that illuminates the complexity of a geographically dispersed and socio-economically stratified multigenerational community [1] (pp. 253–265)[1]. Yet despite much innovative work, blind spots remain. Arguably the most persistently overlooked subgroup comprises Northern Irish people who moved to Great Britain, whether permanently or temporarily, since the Northern Ireland state or statelet came into being in 1921[2]. Despite accounting for a substantial proportion of Britain's post-1945 migrant population, the histories and memories of these generations have been sparsely documented and historically underrepresented in migration research[3]. Back in 2005, Johanne Devlin Trew criticised the

partitionist bias of much Irish migration scholarship and attributed its routine exclusion of the North to the challenges of working with "sets of statistical data (census, etc.) issuing from two jurisdictions where data categories are not identical, thus making the direct comparison of variables frequently impossible" [2] (p. 110). More recently, Marc Scully, in a review of Trew's pioneering study of Northern Irish migration, noted "the sheer difficulty of obtaining accurate statistics, given the invisibility of 'internal migration' from Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK, as well as the conflation of the Northern Irish with either the Irish or British populations in the census statistics of other countries" [3] (p. 103). Such factors highlight the anomalous position the North occupies in the existing historiography and help to explain the paucity of studies of how the province's ethno-religious divisions produced a distinctly different culture of emigration from that of the Irish Republic, as well as the inattention paid to the migration, settlement and adaptation experiences of Northern Irish people in British towns and cities. Trew's observation of 2013 remains pertinent today: "in spite of a substantial body of research on identity issues within Northern Ireland, the rich potential of examining how Northern Irish migrants experience identity on British terrain has been almost entirely overlooked" [4] (p. 131).

2. Materials and Methods

The desire to address this neglect was a primary motivation behind an AHRC-funded oral history research project entitled *Conflict, Memory and Migration: Northern Irish Migrants and the Troubles in Great Britain*, which was carried out by the authors of this article between 2019 and 2022, and on which the following discussion is based. The project set out to examine the complex and distinctive interrelationship between the Northern Ireland Troubles (*c.*1969–1998)—a seismic conflict with complex causes that was located within the borders of the modern United Kingdom nation-state, but with deep roots in its imperial past—and the shaping of distinctive forms of Northern Irish migrant subjectivity and identity in the transnational "diaspora space" [5] of contemporary Britain, with a specific focus on three locations in England and Scotland. Methodologically, we adopted an oral history approach, believing that the privileged access oral testimony provides into the experiential, affective and embodied dimensions of people's lives, as expressed in their own words, is especially valuable when investigating the lives of those who have been culturally occluded or historiographically marginalised, as it is in societies where historical memory is politically contested and selectively memorialised. These conditions are salient features of our project, as they are of the many testimony-gathering initiatives that have in recent years contributed to the sustained uncovering of historical injustices, human rights abuses and sublimated traumas in both political jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.

In total, our project recruited seventy-one individuals (thirty-five men and thirty-six women) of Northern Irish birth or heritage who lived, worked, studied or settled in three British regions—the conurbations of London, Manchester and Glasgow—before, during and after the period of the Troubles. Fifty of our interviewees were first-generation migrants who left Northern Ireland between the early 1960s and the early 2000s to build lives and careers in England and Scotland, where most of them still live. A further nineteen can be broadly classified as second-generation Northern Irish, if we allow for the flexible, non-essentialist usage of this term to describe the fourteen participants who were born in Britain to one or two Northern Irish-born parents, and the five who were born in the North but moved to Britain in infancy or early childhood with their migrating parents and grew up there[4]. Semi-structured life-history interviews, which varied in length from under sixty minutes to almost three hours, were conducted with each of our participants, the oldest of whom was born in 1941 and the youngest in 1995. The question schedule was broadly chronological, loosely structured along a linear temporal line, with many of the questions being intentionally open-ended to allow respondents the freedom to contextualise their life stories and shape their own testimonies. All but two of the interviews (one involving a husband and wife, the other a mother and son) were conducted on a one-to-one basis. Interviewing took place in person, either in participants' homes or in public spaces,

until the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, after which we switched to online interviewing.

When selecting participants, we sought to achieve diversity and variety in terms of age, regional origin, class background and social situation. We also aimed for approximate equivalence between people from Northern Ireland's two dominant religious traditions, Protestantism and Catholicism, each of which has long been an indicator of one's political, cultural and national allegiances, although it should be noted that many of our interviewees who had religious upbringings say they no longer practise their faith and several profess themselves to be agnostics or atheists. While we succeeded in recruiting a varied cohort, we make no claims about its representativeness in relation to the overall population of Northern Irish people in Great Britain, not only because of the smallness of our sample in relation to the size and variability of the larger whole, but also because, as a multidisciplinary research team that regards personal memory narratives as "complex texts mediated by collective ideologies and diverse conditions of cultural production" [6] (p. 27), we share Alessandro Portelli's conviction that 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" [7] (p. 88). It is therefore the complex, intertwined dynamics of subjective experience, memory production and identity construction, embedded in specific historical conditions and discursive contexts, that concern us here, dynamics that we believe are most profitably explored through in-depth textual analysis of individual life-history interviews. For these reasons, we focus our attention in this paper on interviews with five second-generation individuals whose lives coincide with the protracted transition from conflict to peace in Northern Ireland.

The three interviewers (Barry, Fearghus and Jack) sought to honour the idiosyncrasy and particularity of each individual life story and its unique configuration within the context of an oral history interview, while at the same time soliciting interviewees' responses to questions relating to our three interwoven research strands. The first of these focuses on the relationship between ethnic-religious conflict and out-migration in postwar Northern Irish society by examining how social and political developments in the province shaped the causes, practices and experiences of departure. The second strand investigates how the conflict-affected subjectivities and identities of first-generation Northern Irish migrants were challenged, consolidated or reworked through settlement and adaptation to life in England and Scotland, and in relation to the impacts and representations of the Troubles in British society more widely. The third strand explores how memories and narratives of the Troubles were transmitted, interpreted and negotiated within families with at least one Northern Irish-born parent and traces the effects of these processes on the formation of second-generation subjectivity, identity and historical consciousness.

3. Research Contexts and Conceptual Frameworks

The research findings generated by the last of these strands are the focus of this article. If investigative light is seldom shone on the personal histories of first-generation Northern Irish migrants in Britain, an unknown number of whom melted into the social mainstream, then the lives, attitudes and identities of their sons and daughters are even more in shadow. Whereas there is a considerable array of scholarship on the disparate discourses and practices that inform the outlook and identities of the British-born offspring of emigrants from the Irish Republic, the distinctive histories and positionalities of their Northern Irish counterparts have been little studied [8–10]. The scholarly neglect of this second-generation cohort has, we contend, resulted in an incomplete historical record and impeded awareness and understanding of a more diverse gamut of identity positions. It has also inhibited the development of more expansive conceptualisations of second-generation Irish migrant subjectivities in Britain that are inclusive of the experiences and perspectives of those whose psyches are marked by the legacies of the Troubles, whether through

direct experience, inherited memory or both. Commenting on the existing historiography, Mary Hickman highlights the "substantial and consistent" [11] (p. 154) research evidence that shows the identity affiliations of English-born children of Irish migrants to be subject to practices of exclusion and differentiation from the oppositional hegemonies of Englishness and Irishness, which render them both deficiently English and deficiently Irish. To date, however, scant attention has been paid to whether and how this dichotomised paradigm can accommodate the plural self-identities and competing loyalties of those of Northern Irish parentage, thus restricting the potential for more nuanced narratives and interpretations to emerge.

The following analysis aims to expand and diversify the historiography of second-generation Irishness in Britain by highlighting the centrality of parentally transmitted conflict memory narratives, and the dearth thereof, to the forms of self-understanding, historical consciousness and transnational identity and belonging that the children of Northern Irish parents develop and sustain during their adolescent and adult lives in England. Drawing on the oral testimony of five such children, now grown up, we examine the intricate and manifold ways in which their identities have been influenced and shaped by whether and how Troubles-related memories and experiences were shared with them by their parents during their formative years in England and the significance and meaning they attach to these inherited narratives in the unfolding present and anticipated future. Our core thesis is that there is a complex, evolving correlation between parents' diverse and contrasting approaches to memory-sharing and storytelling and the various ways in which their offspring agentively engage with and make use of these received narratives within the context of their own lives, as they come to understand, identify and position themselves discursively within contemporary English society. As this implies, our analysis is premised on the belief that our interviewees are not mere passive recipients or uncritical consumers of parental narratives of the Troubles but strategic and performative interpreters and users of them, as part of their evolving processes of active self-fashioning. That is to say, each has a capacity for narrative agency, a concept defined by Hanna Meretoja as "our ability to navigate our narrative environments: to use, (re)interpret, and engage with narratives that are culturally available to us, to analyze and challenge them, and to practice agential choice over which narratives we use and how we narrate our lives, relationships, and the world around us" [12] (p. 296). An important part of our task, then, is to track the different forms and degrees of interpretive agency our respondents exercise as they explain how they understand themselves in relation to their parents' cultural and political heritages, alongside other social and discursive influences, such as their own subjective experiences of the North during and after the Troubles, their exposure to English societal narratives about the conflict and their engagement with the cultural politics of Irish diasporic identity and transnational belonging.

Our focus on parentally transmitted memories of political violence and their impact on identity formation in migration-affected families takes us into a discursive zone where multiple lines of academic inquiry dialogically interact and modify each other. It has long been accepted within the field of memory studies that memory, subjectivity and identity are deeply complicated and intrinsically protean entities that are subject to continual contestation, modification and reconfiguration over the life course and in relation to other people and their memories [13,14]. More recent research has posited that familial cultures of memory are dynamic social arenas in which subjective and collective memories are made and remade, shared and withheld, repudiated and manipulated, even weaponised, for myriad reasons [15]. There is also widespread recognition that, as a social practice, "Memory, in all its forms, physical, psychological, cultural, and familial, plays a crucial role within the contexts of migration, immigration, resettlement, and diasporas, for memory provides continuity to the dislocations of individual and social identity" [16] (p. 3).

Since memory's connective capacity is often made to bear profound emotional weight where such dislocations are related to war or armed conflict, the "specific question of how political violence is remembered, how memories of this violence are transmitted, and the

uses to which the memories are put" [17] (p. 3) has generated a vast body of research on intergenerational conflict memory transmission and reception in various transnational settings. Understandably, the Second World War and the Holocaust have been the focal points of much of this research, and some of it directly informs the following analysis, as we explain below. Our thinking has also been informed by recent studies that deploy an oral history methodology to explore intergenerational conflict memory transmission and its enduring effects among migrant communities in other cultural and historical circumstances [18–20]. In addition to offering suggestive comparative perspectives on the interrelations between conflict, memory and migration, such studies aid our understanding of the specificities of our own study, concerned as it is with individuals whose sense of belonging in the country of their upbringing is, to varying degrees, conditioned by the pull exerted by family lineages and experiences rooted in the nearby parental homeland, which lies across a narrow sea. Indeed, our research shows just how deeply the relationship between inherited family narratives of the Troubles and second-generation identity construction is embedded in, and inflected by, a dense web of interpersonal relations, social processes and public discourses that links our respondents' culture of residence in England to their ancestral culture in Northern Ireland.

It behoves us, therefore, to keep in mind the interlocking contexts in which our respondents' transnational remembering of their pasts are situated as we consider the specific determinants of their individual "narrative inheritances", a term coined by Howard Goodall to describe the "afterlives of the sentences used to spell out the life stories of those who came before us" [21] (p. 497). "What we inherit narratively from our forebears provides us with a framework for understanding our identity through theirs", Goodall asserts, adding that this framework enables us to interpret "our life grammar and working logic as an extension of, or a rebellion against, the way we story how they lived and thought about things, and it allows us to explain to others where we come from and how we were raised in the continuing context of what it all means" [21] (p. 497). With its emphasis on people's interpretive and agentive mediation of the transgenerational ramifications of the life histories of their forebears in light of their own unfolding life stories, Goodall's concept is one of the interpretive keys we find useful in our analysis of the narratives at the centre of this discussion, not least because it provides a helpful lens through which to examine the testimony of those whose narrative inheritances consist of parental life stories couched in obscure, incoherent or incomplete sentences as a result of complex processes of remembering and forgetting about the Troubles and their enduring impacts.

The other key theoretical concept that underpins and orients our analysis is Marianne Hirsch's seminal notion of postmemory, which she originally formulated in relation to traumatised Holocaust survivors' transmission of their memories to their children, whether in the form of words, images or the silences that often replaced speech. As Hirsch theorises it, postmemory is a particular, complex way of relating to troubled or traumatised pasts, one that "is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" [22] (p. 22). Postmemory, she explains, describes

> the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. [23] (p. 5)

Theorised thus, postmemory "is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" [22] (p. 22). Postmemory's power, however, is tempered by the myriad uncertainties, distortions and hesitations that impede and obstruct the "lines of relation and identification" [24] (p. 9) that connect the generations. Such complications are acknowledged by Hirsch when she speaks of "the inevitable disappointments" [23] (p. 247) that characterise postmemorial work and observes that "silence, absence, and emptiness are also always present, and often central to the work

of postmemory" [23] (p. 247). This aspect of Hirsch's formulation of postmemory has particular relevance for the positions from which some of our narrators speak, as does her recognition that postmemory is not a wholly subjective phenomenon but one enacted in social contexts and mediated "through cultural and public, and not merely individual and personal, acts of remembrance" [24] (pp. 8–9).

From her earliest iterations of this concept, Hirsch acknowledged that postmemory "may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences" [22] (p. 22), thus preparing the ground for the term's wider application to societies grappling with the transgenerational legacies of violent histories, as evidenced by oral history studies of the forms of postmemory generated by events such as the Lebanese civil war and the state violence of the Pinochet regime in Chile [25,26]. Such studies have profitably deployed Hirsch's ideas to examine how second-generation memory is shaped in the aftermath of atrocity, yet to date there have been few applications of postmemory theory to the personal memory narratives of those who grew up in the wake of the Troubles [27,28][5]. The following analysis addresses this deficit by demonstrating how Hirsch's concept can illuminate the distinctive experience of intergenerational conflict memory transmission and reception in families of Northern Irish descent in England, represented here by five narrators whose testimonies can be understood as differing manifestations of familial postmemory within the contingent intersubjective setting of an oral history interview. In revealing the varying intensities of thought and feeling that these postmemory accounts evoke, we contend that they afford us valuable new insights into the intricate interplay between first-generation conflict memory and second-generation postmemory within the same "family frame", to adapt one of Hirsch's favoured phrases. We attend closely to the unique familial environment and biographical trajectory in which each narrative is embedded and examine the differential impact of parental memory-sharing practices, alongside other social and discursive influences, on these five narrators' evolving negotiation of their narrative inheritances. Throughout, our concern is with the nature, depth and complexity of interviewees' affective and agentive engagements with parental conflict memory and the corresponding specificity of the plural forms of self-identity and self-understanding to which they give expression in their postmemory narratives.

As will be seen, the life stories of our chosen respondents reveal that they grew up in families with markedly different cultures of memory and storytelling, ranging from the candidly forthright to the decidedly guarded. The first three interviews we discuss, those of Paul Ord, Meghan Chard and Michael Cassidy, are with adult children of Northern Irish parents who frequently and openly discussed their personal experiences and views of the Troubles with them during their English upbringings. All three attest to the powerful and abiding impact of hearing their parents' affect-laden memories and stories, conveyed with what Eva Hoffman, Hirsch's near-contemporary, calls "the authority of actual witness and vividness of an embodied voice" [30] (p. 186). In their reflections on these formative family experiences, this trio demonstrate the various and contrasting ways in which inherited conflict memory narratives interact with other social and cultural discourses to shape identities that emerge as self-consciously situational (Paul), elementally discordant (Meghan) and tactfully composed (Michael).

Our other two interviewees, Lauren Kane and Rachel Lewis, come from families where the sharing of conflict-related memory was limited and sporadic, which left them with markedly gapped narrative inheritances and negligible knowledge of the Troubles and Northern Irish society more generally. For them, the task of postmemory largely consists of trying to make sense of the silences and evasions of their respective family pasts, as they come to terms with the fact that so much has been withheld, obscured or erased. As such, their testimonies contain rare insights into the complex and enduring effects of intergenerational memory suppression and strategic forgetting and shine valuable light on the agentive responses these processes can engender in the second generation. By examining each of these five narratives in turn, we hope to attain a clearer understanding of the inner complexity and sophistication of each respondent's interpretive engagement

with parentally mediated memories of the Troubles, whether richly storied or sparsely shared, and the significance of this process for their evolving negotiation of their identities over time.

4. "Irishness Was Something You Could Tune Up or Tune Down": Paul's Story

We begin with the interview testimony of Paul Ord, who was born in Belfast in 1982 to parents who had recently returned to the city after spending time in England, both separately and as a couple, during the latter part of the 1970s. However, their hopes of raising a family in the suburb of Glengormley foundered on the reality of escalating sectarian violence, to which they felt particularly vulnerable as a couple in a "mixed" marriage, Paul's father being Protestant and his mother Catholic. Disillusioned, they returned to England in 1984 for what turned out to be a permanent move. The family initially lived in Cambridgeshire, then relocated to Welwyn Garden City in Hertfordshire in 1988, where Paul lived with his brother and sister until he moved to Cornwall in 2003 to study art at Falmouth College of Arts (now Falmouth University). He later completed a masters degree in cultural history at the University of Brighton, and was still in higher education when interviewed for our project by Fearghus in January 2020.

Unsurprisingly, Paul has no full-fledged memories of the short period his family spent in Glengormley during his early childhood. He does, however, discuss some fragmented but vivid recollections of childhood journeys from England to visit his maternal grandparents in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh in the late 1980s and early 1990s. His narration of these memories is notably self-reflexive, interlaced with comments about the unreliability of his recall and informed by his awareness of the many variables that govern the intricate workings of subjective memory. His account is also influenced by his interest in theoretical and empirical issues relating to the interactions between individual and collective memory. Indeed, in the closing minutes of the interview he states that he has been thinking about his "memories of childhood and memories more generally in a different way in light of my study of cultural memory" [31], and expresses a fascination for "the influence of cinematic narrative and cinematic forms on your memory and how it's constructed, and how you then remember and re-remember your experiences" [31].

The imprint of these interests is traceable in the dream-like recollections he recounts of journeys to the Six Counties that were "exciting and intimidating at the same time" [31]. For example, he impressionistically recalls passing through a "strange border" [31] to get to the "beautifully cosy environment" [31] of his grandparents' bungalow in Enniskillen, where Christmas presents lay "right next to these kind of oddly pagan and barbaric images of a weeping Jesus with an exposed heart, and then stories about the Enniskillen bombing itself" [31], which he says he does not "really remember fully" [31]. This memory sequence then segues into a recollection of him being driven past the site of the bombing, which was carried out by the Provisional IRA on Remembrance Sunday in 1987, and "looking for a trace of this event" [31], after which he has a mental image of himself in "the local shopping centre with the same, like, disconcertingly, the same clothes brands and stuff as at home, and it's, like, this constant gravitating between the familiar and the unusual I think, which I found really interesting and really exciting" [31].

While these enigmatic childhood memories of the North clearly intrigue Paul, their impact on the development of his second-generation identity appears to have been less formative than the memories about the Troubles relayed to him by his parents. His striking admission that "My inner sense of the events that affected my parents is more vivid than the ones that took place during my own lifetime" [31] is borne out by the emotional intensity and immediacy with which he narrates episodes from his parents' pasts that they passed on to him during his English upbringing. His animated retelling of these mediated narratives invites us to interpret them as manifestations of familial postmemory, which, Hirsch tells us, "is not identical to memory: it is 'post'; but, at the same time [. . .] it approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic affects" [23] (p. 31). As such, postmemory is, in the words of

oral historian Sean Field, an inherently "paradoxical form of memory: seeming to constitute one's own memory but having no element of actual recall" [32] (p. 125).

A few minutes into the interview, Paul is asked about his parents' lives in Belfast in the years prior to his birth. In his answer, he focuses primarily on what his mother told him and his siblings about finding herself in "some quite difficult situations" [31] while working in a city-centre bank in the early 1970s. He recalls her describing occasions when car bombs were detonated near her workplace and how she once accidentally breached a police cordon, which resulted in "a crowd of people shouting at her and eventually there was a controlled explosion [. . .] very close to her" [31]. He then goes on to reflect on his belated recognition of the enduring psychological and somatic effects of his mother's lived experience of the Troubles, making a link between her proximity to "sudden, abrupt explosions" [31] and her being "quite a nervous person, she'll jump at the slightest noise, you know, things like that" [31]. Later, by way of exemplifying the vividness of the "second-hand knowledge" [31] his mother bequeathed to him in childhood, Paul describes her graphic recollections of the harrowing scenes she witnessed in Belfast on 21 July 1972, a day that came to be known as Bloody Friday, when twenty-six IRA bombs exploded across the city, killing eleven people and maiming over one hundred others. He recalls:

> She remembers seeing, as she put it, bits of people being put into bags, you know, which I found shocking when I was a kid, but only really I think visualised maybe more fully as the years went by, you know. [. . .] She might have seen, for example, a bit of a hand or something semi-recognisable being put in a bag, you know, and it was only really in probably my twenties that I was, like, that's really, that's a terrible, terrible thing to have seen, and beyond, genuinely beyond my comprehension what it would be like to have seen something like that, and how that might change you in different ways, and what you might have to do to make sense of having seen something like that, you know, what processes you might have to go through internally to try and make sense of it. [31]

These disclosures cast revealing light on the forms of latency and belatedness that can inhere in conflict-related memory as it is experienced, assimilated and orally transmitted in the "miniculture" [21] (p. 510) of a migrant family. The delayed manifestation of Troubles-induced trauma and anxiety within domestic space is exemplified by Paul's perception of his mother's nervous hypervigilance, a well-established somatic symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. His recollection of her persistent psychological edginess accords with Susan J. Brison's hypothesis that traumatic memories that are not worked through "remain in the body, in each of the senses, in the heart that races and skin that crawls whenever something resurrects the only slightly buried terror" [33] (p. 42). Brison's emphasis on the body as a repository of unassimilable memories complements a point Hirsch makes about the role of "embodied and affective experience" [23] (p. 33) in the generation and transmission of postmemories within homely and familial spaces, and validates Gabriele Schwab's assertion that the children of parents who have experienced violent histories receive them "not only through the actual memories or stories of parents (postmemory) but also through the traces of affect, particularly affect that remains unintegrated and unassimilable" [34] (p. 14). Paul's allusion to the significant temporal delay between his childhood reception of his mother's memories and his retroactive evaluation of them highlights the second generation's difficulty in cognitively processing the impact and import of these symptoms. Indeed, his admission that the full magnitude of his mother's anguish and its psychological afterlife remains "genuinely beyond my comprehension" underscores the salience of Hirsch's argument that to "grow up with overwhelming inherited memories [. . .] is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension" [23] (p. 5). Furthermore, his resort to imaginative speculation about what his mother "might have seen" on that grim Belfast afternoon, as he tries to empathically intuit the profound psychic, somatic and emotional legacies of her exposure to scenes of carnage, bears out

Hirsch's key assertion that postmemory's relation to the past is "mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" [23] (p. 5).

The correlations between Hirsch's theorisation of postmemory and Paul's negotiation of parentally mediated memories of the Troubles do not end there. Paul's interview testimony suggests that his father's recollections of witnessing violent events in Belfast are as forcefully embedded in his consciousness as those of his mother, even though he admits that his interest in these recollections was only belatedly piqued by the onset of his father's terminal illness. Despite or perhaps because of this, Paul's account of hearing his father recall a bomb explosion in Belfast in the early 1970s provides vivid proof of how deeply such powerful recollections, in their form and content, are imprinted on his own memory and imagination, to the extent that he approximates to one of Hirsch's "adoptive witnesses" [23] (p. 6), that is, a second-generation family member whose connection to parentally transmitted memories is so empathically felt that they gain vicarious experience of them. Here is the relevant passage from his interview:

> I remember my dad telling me about seeing the [pauses], the Belfast station explosion from a pub, and in his memory he was, he was, like, it was like he saw the whole roof lift before it shattered, and whether or not that was true, he himself at the time was kind of quite, he was quite, you know, he, he was a very intelligent man, so he, he I think quite astutely had, like, a reflexive, is the word, the right word maybe, attitude to his own memory, so he was, like, I don't know if this is constructed or whatever, but I seem to remember the whole roof going up in the air before it shattered and then came down and he rem-, you know, there was a, there was a young woman screaming and he, either he, I can't remember, or somebody there, who was probably a bit drunk or at least, like, mellow was just, you know, saying och give over, you know, it's alright, like, mad isn't it, like, just really, just, like, it's alright, it's okay, that kind of, like, yeah, and that, I found that really, really weird. [31]

Paul's halting description of this act of memory transfer features a telling shift from autobiographical recall ("I remember my dad telling me") to vicarious memory ("in his memory he was"; "it was like he saw"), a shift that brings him into such close proximity to his father's mnemonic processes as to blur the dichotomy between self and other, direct experience and mediated experience. The "ownership" of the memories being narrated here is further obscured by the unsettling of the temporal distinctions between the "now" of the interview, the "then" of Paul's hearing his father's account of the explosion and, beyond that, the "then" of the original event. As Paul in his retelling flits between his own and his father's memory, simultaneously visualising and decoding the unfolding scene, he arrestingly appears to speak as a firsthand witness to the explosion ("I seem to remember the whole roof going up in the air before it shattered and then came down"), as if his "memory" of the event has eclipsed or become fused with that of his father. This seamless, and seemingly unconscious, act of memory fusion or appropriation aptly illustrates Hirsch's insight that those who experience cultural or collective trauma may transmit their experiences to the next generation "so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right".

As the foregoing discussion demonstrates, Paul exhibits a high degree of self-reflexivity when agentively analysing both his childhood impressions of pre-peace process Northern Ireland and the conflict memories bequeathed to him by his parents. This same quality characterises his reflections on how these firsthand experiences and inherited narratives have intersected with his developing sense of cultural identity and national belonging in England. He recalls that the abiding impression created by his "really magical" [31] childhood visits to Ulster was a feeling "of being transported in more ways than one" [31] from the "benign, sedentary" [31] landscapes of the Home Counties to the "more wild and impressive and sometimes bleak" [31] spaces of the Six Counties, where he entered "a different realm of culture and speech and politics" [31]. While the "awe-inspiring" [31]

vistas of rural Ulster delighted him, he was discomfited by the imputation that this was his real home, his true place of belonging. He explains:

> It's the place you're told you're from, so it's, like, you're from here, and that kind of on one level makes perfect sense and on another is quite alienating because you're, like, okay, well, I am, but it doesn't mean I know what's going on, it doesn't mean I understand it or know it. I couldn't, if you'd told me, if you'd asked me when I was fourteen years old even to list the names of the six counties, I wouldn't have been able to tell you I don't think, I was that ignorant. [31]

Paul's experience of radical dislocation in the parental homeland is not unusual among returning child migrants or second-generation "returnees". But whereas similar experiences produced intense inner conflicts of identity in other of our interviewees, Paul's feelings of equivocal belonging appear to have instilled in him an enduring aversion to definitive self-identification. Hence his references to himself as "in inverted commas, somebody from Northern Ireland" [31] and as "sort of Irish" [31] and his eschewal of the generation-based identity categories that are commonly invoked in discussions of diasporic Irishness. Far from regarding ethnicity and identity as primordial attributes, Paul espouses a postmodern view of them as fluid social constructs that are shaped and reshaped by discursive, institutional and ideological forces. He asserts that "when we talk about truth in terms of identity, we're talking about something a lot more slippery than a lot of the time people realise, you know, the truth of what you are and who you are and how that is constituted" [31]. This affinity for the open-ended and the indeterminate helps to explain his pleasurable possession of a cultural identity that has "always been really amorphous" [31] and his cultivation in childhood of a fluid situational identity, which led his older brother to tease him about being a "social chameleon" [31][6].

Paul traces the origins of this attribute to his Catholic primary school education in Welwyn Garden City, where he encountered other children from Irish backgrounds and through them became aware that there were "gradations of Englishness or Irishness, depending on which way you decide to look at it" [31]. Having observed how these gradations were expressed and negotiated by others, he engaged in his own form of identity performance by learning to adapt his self-presentation in response to his social and cultural circumstances. In discussing how he did this, he attributes a considerable degree of agency and autonomy to his childhood self, as in the following passage:

> I think what happened in that period, like, between, say, six and eleven, before going to secondary school, there'd already been established this sense of me being one or the other at will, you know, so Irishness was something you could tune up or tune down, depending on what circumstances you were in. So when you went on holiday back to Northern Ireland to see grandparents, your Irishness came out, when you went home, where you spoke to your grandparents on the phone or you heard somebody else with a Northern Irish accent, but that at school, surrounded by people with, like, Home Counties accents, it retreated. [31]

Paul makes apt use of the tuning metaphor here to describe his strategic orchestration of his Irishness and his ability to amplify or moderate it situationally. By such subtle means, he was able to explore the socio-cultural possibilities of identity enactment and navigate the shifting tides of social expectation and acceptance. It was a behaviour he continued into adulthood, as evidenced by his stories of playing up to Irish and Northern Irish stereotypes with mischievous irony in different social situations in England and in Poland, where his partner comes from. In these parts of his interview, Paul speaks with a *sang-froid* that suggests a desire to maintain a studied ambiguity on the question of identity and so keep his distance from the constraints of any singular category of national belonging, an attitude encapsulated in his reference to Irishness as "something you could dip your toe in, and dip in and out" [31][7]. When, in the aftermath of the 2016 UK referendum on EU membership, he was forced to re-evaluate this non-committal stance and apply for his first Irish passport in order to retain "the freedom to go and live and work in the EU with ease if necessary" [31],

the irony of his doing so was not lost on him. Yet he remains resistant to any suggestion that his acquisition of an Irish passport might make him "more Irish" [31] than he was before, seeing it instead as "a further development in this [. . .] ambivalence in me as to what I am, [. . .] and I don't think anything could maybe underscore that ambivalence any more clearly than the fact that I'm not acquiring one so I can live in Ireland" [31].

5. "It Makes You More Proud to Be Irish Because of The Troubles": Meghan's Story

The interpretive agency and narrative control that Paul Ord displays throughout his discussion of his outsider–insider identity has its antithesis in the emotionally charged narrative of Meghan Chard, whose early life featured a good deal of back-and-forth movement between the North of Ireland and the north-west of England. Meghan was born in Dungannon, County Tyrone in 1987 to Catholic nationalist parents from working-class Belfast backgrounds, whose fraught experiences of growing up in the North before and after the eruption of the Troubles motivated them to seek better social and economic opportunities elsewhere. At the time of her birth, the family was in the process of moving from the Bahamas, where her parents had worked as teachers for seven years, to Prestwich in Manchester, where Meghan attended primary school. When she was eleven, her parents moved back to Tyrone with a view to settling there, but returned to Manchester four years later, which meant that her secondary education was split between Catholic schools in Dungannon and Bury in Greater Manchester.

At the very start of her interview with Barry, Meghan, who is a dentist by profession, reflects on the profound developmental influence her intercultural upbringing has had on her subjectivity and sense of national identity. Speaking with heightened emotion, she explains how keenly she feels the strain of a debilitating self-division that is the combined legacy of her peripatetic early years and her narrative inheritance from her parents:

> I've grown up between Manchester and Ireland really, and obviously you hear all the encounters of your parents and, you know, their childhood and what they went through and things like that, so you have a real connection to that sort of, to that, to the sort of the Troubles and their journey that they had through that time and, but at the same time obviously I've grown up in England and so, for most part that is, and so therefore I feel that I'm very, very torn in who I am. I'm very torn in what my, what my nationality is, so I feel like, I feel like in my heart I'm Irish, but then at the same time I feel very much mixed. I feel Irish in my heart, but then really in my, in my probably mentality, not mentality, in my sort of [pauses] behaviour, my thoughts, I don't know, I feel like, very British, you know. I very much follow sort of British etiquette and things like that and, so I just find it interesting how, how sort of my generation has been affected by my parents being from Ireland and, you know, how I'd have been different if we'd stayed in Ireland. [36]

With these opening remarks, Meghan reveals the painful national limbo she inhabits and the anguished misalignment of feelings that makes the narration of an orderly and integrated self-account challenging. Much of the testimony that follows further amplifies her anxieties about her indeterminate sense of nationality and her continual struggle to mediate the conflicting strands of her identity. She traces the first stirrings of what became a persistent inner dilemma to her grammar school days in Tyrone where, despite proclaiming her Irishness, she was regarded as English by her peers. The acute self-questioning this engendered ("Who am I? Am I Irish? Am I English? I don't really know" [36]) has evidently reverberated through her being ever since, fuelling "a constant sort of tension because I'm never fully Irish and I'm never fully English. I'm neither really" [36]. Although she feels a certain affinity for the broader British identity into which she has been socialised, thinking of herself as British fails to quell her restive feelings of incompleteness. Instead, it reminds her of the tendency of a hegemonic Britishness to flatten the subnational distinctions of the plurinational state that is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. So while she carries a UK passport and acknowledges that "Britain has been my home and

looked after me" [36], she also recalls having heated arguments about her nationality with a Mancunian friend ("a Brexiteer kind of guy" [36]), he insisting on her Britishness, she declaring, "I'm not British, I'm Northern Irish" [36]. With audible agitation, she explains how this tussle culminated in her pointing out to him that the cover of her passport reads "Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but I'm not bloody, I'm not Great British, I'm Northern Irish" [36].

As an illustration of Meghan's antipathy towards the homogenising force of British nationalism, this anecdote is tellingly revealing. It is also indicative of the widespread confusion in Britain about what the "United Kingdom" actually is, as attested by the common interchangeability of the terms "Britain" and "UK" in everyday discourse. Yet as Meghan herself recognises, her wishful rhetorical reconstitution of Northern Ireland as a sovereign, independent nation—by means of an ingenious and, in the context of Brexit, richly ironic interpretation of the conjunction "and" in the official title of the United Kingdom state—cannot survive contact with cold constitutional reality. When required to specify her nationality for official purposes, she explains that "just for ease sake I put British, but I don't feel, but I know that in my heart I'm not British" [36], a remark that underscores her ongoing psychological and emotional unease.

Meghan's interview contains some intriguing insights into the influence of her parents' experience and interpretation of the Troubles on her attempts to achieve inner equanimity and create narrative coherence from a maelstrom of possible selves and identities. She implicitly acknowledges that she is speaking from a position of postmemory when she expresses her belief in the shaping power of transgenerational conflict memory by observing that "the impact [the conflict] had on my parents translates to their kids, you know, their insecurities, their fears, you know. I think that passes on through generations" [36]. Although she stops short of invoking the paradigm of traumatic memory that is often associated with the intrafamilial transmission of memories of political violence, she does point out that, as Catholic nationalists living in a religiously mixed area of Belfast, the early years of the Troubles "were quite traumatic times" [36] for her parents, who frequently shared their "quite shocking" [36] stories with her and her three siblings. Echoes of Paul's testimony are audible in these remarks, and while there are no instances in Meghan's interview of the kind of self-reflexive postmemorial remembrance we have traced in his, she, like him, shows herself to be a bearer of enduringly affective postmemories, as evidenced by her emotional retelling of her father's account of his family home being firebombed by local loyalists during the initial phase of the conflict in 1969–1970, which seems to have left a particularly lasting impression on her: "He was living in a Protestant area and they had, like, a cross put on their door and then they had to evacuate sort of thing, and then they came back and everything had been burned and pooed on and completely defiled" [36].

Little wonder, then, that Meghan should recall how forthright her parents were in their criticism of the structural anti-Catholic discrimination they encountered in Ulster, which made them feel that they and their kind were "second-class citizens" [36]. This trenchant critique was part of a wider anticolonial Irish nationalism Meghan inherited from her parents, whom she remembers being "very passionate about, like, Irish history and sort of the hardship that the Irish have endured from the British" [36]. Her agentive embrace of this received narrative of historical victimhood and its imprint on her own life are clear from her admission that she shares her parents' views and that her loyalties lie firmly with the nationalist cause, to the extent that she sometimes feels "a bit sort of ignited and a bit sort of, yeah, real pro-Ireland and sort of, you know, against, against the British, definitely" [36]. When asked whether her identity formation has been affected by the history and politics of the Troubles in particular, her answer is unequivocal: "Yeah, a hundred per cent, yeah, yeah, yeah. [. . .] I feel like you're just more, it's almost like a badge of honour and you've got to keep, you know, yeah, it makes you more proud to be Irish because of the Troubles and the hardship they've been through" [36].

In these responses, Meghan articulates a version of diasporic Irishness that is based on a deeply felt need to honour the spirit and sacrifice of those, including her working-class

parents, who have survived the adversity of the recent past in Northern Ireland. Her animated expressions of national pride indicate that she also wishes to pay homage to, and thereby align herself with, the generations of Irish people whose opposition to British rule underpinned the centuries-long struggle for national independence, a struggle that, in the minds of some, has one outstanding item of "unfinished business": the absorption of the British-governed Six Counties into a reunified sovereign Ireland. Yet Meghan's very statement of affiliation with this time-honoured, yet contested, identity raises doubts about whether her adoption of it will alleviate, let alone heal, her torn allegiances. Her allusion to the need to maintain one's fealty to this "badge of honour" [36] betrays a sense of filial obligation to do so, and with this comes the anxiety and guilt of falling short of expectations.

These discomfiting emotions simmer to the surface at intervals in her interview, most especially when she airs her worries about the gradual attrition of her working-class Irishness in affluent Surrey, where she lives with her English husband and daughter. On the one hand, she explains that she makes her Northern Irish background "quite known" [36] in the local community and willingly discusses the Troubles with her English in-laws whenever the subject is raised, in an attempt to counteract the misperceptions of the conflict she believes they have imbibed from a partisan British media. On the other hand, she says that the longer she lives in England, and the fewer her visits to Ireland, the more she fears that she is "going back to [. . .] feeling more British" [36]. That her negotiation of these tensions is informed by a significant element of middle-class guilt is attested by her somewhat sheepish admission that she voted for the Conservative Party in the UK general election of 2019, which she rationalises by explaining that she is a "business owner" [36] living in "quite a Tory place" [36], whereas she was "probably more heavily influenced by my parents when I was living with them in Manchester, which is very Labour anyway" [36].

Meghan's reflections on her identity drift bring poignant autobiographical milestones to light, pre-eminent among which is her surrender of her maiden name in marriage, which she ruefully recalls as a kind of fall from a state of cultural or ethnic grace:

> I found it quite hard to change my name, you know, when I got married, you know, as well because I felt like my surname was a real part of my identity. It sort of straight away showed people that I was Irish, whereas now I've got, like, an English name and that was quite hard for me because I'm just like an average English person now. [36]

Her loss of religious faith emerges as a more troubling, guilt-inducing deviation from the predetermined path of Catholic nationalist Irishness. Knowing how important Catholicism is to her parents, and mindful of their having been "discriminated because of it" [36] in the North, it pains her to say that she no longer believes in the church's teachings or attends mass. Yet in the next breath she reveals how "culturally important" [36] it was to her nonetheless that her daughter be baptised Catholic, despite her knowing that her local Anglican church is much more welcoming than its Catholic equivalent. Meghan's contradictory impulses audibly perturb her at this point in the interview as she recalls how she and her husband "felt really a bit awkward, to be honest, getting her christened, felt a bit like, we felt a bit sort of, like, frauds really" [36]. Searching for a retrospective rationale to calm her resurgent moral qualms, she says that she simply "couldn't do it" [36] to her parents to put them through an Anglican baptism, yet her thoughts remain agitated. As this strand of the conversation trails off inconclusively, a self-interrogatory question is left hovering in the air—"Isn't that silly that [. . .] even though I'm not even religious, I'd rather get her christened Catholic?" [36]—further proof, perhaps, that the tension between ethnic solidarity and personal autonomy is felt particularly acutely by the second generation during seminal rites of passage—weddings, baptisms, funerals—when religious-based traditions exert their latent power.

The soul-searching engendered by Meghan's cognitive dissonance over her residual attachment to a religious ideology in which she has ceased to believe is linked to an earlier moment in the interview where she recalls an event from her childhood of potentially destabilising significance for her burgeoning nationalist sympathies. On the morning of

Saturday 15 June 1996, nine-year-old Meghan and her mother were at home in Prestwich when they heard a distant blast that her mother instantly recognised as a bomb explosion. A 1500 kg van bomb had exploded near the Arndale shopping centre in central Manchester, injuring over two hundred people and causing an estimated 400 million pounds' worth of structural damage. It was the largest device to be detonated by the IRA during its twenty-five-year sporadic bombing campaign in England, which began in 1973 [37] (pp. 192–212); [38] (pp. 202–204). While she does not record her mother's reaction to this devastating attack, Meghan's recollection of its effect on her own young mind shows her struggling to articulate the difficulty she had then—and still appears to have at the time of the interview—in reconciling her perplexity at this irruption of Irish republican violence in her home city with her prior impression of the IRA's role in the attritional war in her native province:

> I didn't really under-, yeah, I don't really understand why the IRA were bombing England sort of thing. I didn't really, it was a bit confusing because, I don't know, I don't know if I should say this, but I felt like the IRA in my family were, like, yes, I know they're a terrorist group, so that's, now I look back and I know that was terrorism, but it, obviously they were polit-, it was a political thing and they played a really important role in sort of trying to resolve the Troubles really, and helping the Catholics, but obviously they did some horrendous stuff which you just can't, you know, justify, but I guess, I was only a child, but in my head from what I'd heard I kind of thought the IRA were meant to be good, and then they bombed Manchester, so yeah, it was a bit kind of confusing. [36]

The extent of Meghan's mental and moral disorientation here is evident from her disjointed syntax, mingled tenses and hesitancy in speaking about her own and her family's ambivalent sympathies for an organisation that was demonised in the British public sphere. Clearly, this is a story she has difficulty telling on several levels, and even though she minimises the magnitude of her confusion, there is little to suggest that the tensions and contradictions in her feelings and attitudes have been fully resolved.

When asked at the close of the interview how she would describe her identity now, Meghan hesitates before saying, "I'm an Irish Mancunian, [. . .] I couldn't just say British and I couldn't just say Irish" [36]. In opting for a composite identity that combines her preferred national and regional affiliations, she, like several of our second-generation narrators, finds a form of words to express her sense of cultural in-betweenness that pointedly eschews the words "English" and "British". Yet this is not her final word on the matter. As if to underline the unsettled nature of her interstitial state of mind, she goes on to observe that the descriptor "Northern Irish" continues to hold significance for how she self-identifies, saying, "I do feel like my identity is Northern Irish, more than just Ireland" [36]. Asked to specify her reason for making this distinction, she cites "the hardship that Northern Ireland went through during the Troubles" [36], thus highlighting yet again the affective influence on her subjectivity of her continuing personal affiliation to the unruly particularities of Ulster's thirty-year experience of civil strife.

6. "Hey You, Shut Up, My Mum's Irish": Michael's Story

Although his Northern Irish connections are not quite as deeply rooted as those of Meghan Chard, Michael Cassidy's account of the impact of intergenerational conflict memory transmission on the formation of his subjectivity, national identity and cultural affiliations bears some striking similarities to hers, as well as significant differences. Michael, who teaches languages, was born to Catholic parents in Rochdale in Greater Manchester in 1986 and raised predominantly in Runcorn in Cheshire. His father, who is also from Rochdale, and his mother, who was born in Lurgan in County Armagh, met in the early 1980s in Liverpool, where they were working for the NHS, he as a hospital pharmacist, she as a nurse. Throughout his interview with Barry, Michael affirms how integral his mother's accounts of her life in Northern Ireland before and during the Troubles were to his upbringing, thus revealing his perception of the conflict to be foundationally shaped by

postmemories of her experiences. Reflecting on what she told him about her early life in Lurgan and her subsequent time as a trainee nurse in Belfast, he states: “my understanding of the situation in Northern Irish society as it was in the 1960s and seventies was very much formed by my mum’s personal experiences” [39]. Echoing Meghan, he recalls how his mother would “always tell us about the discrimination that Catholics faced” [39] and the “structural prejudice against them in the labour market” [39].

Other of his mother’s memories carried greater emotional weight, as indicated by his remark that “if things would happen in the news when I was younger, I can remember her getting upset, things to do with the paramilitaries or the peace process, because I think that would stir up a lot of upsetting, traumatic and painful memories from that time” [39]. One of his mother’s most searing childhood experiences occurred at the outbreak of the conflict in the late 1960s when, like Meghan’s father, she endured the ordeal of being burned out of her family home by “mobs of loyalists” [39], a story Michael heard “countless times” [39] in his youth. He explains that her terror and bewilderment were exacerbated by the fact that RUC policemen and British Army soldiers stood by and “watched it happen and didn’t lift a finger” [39], which left her with a reservoir of bitterness as well as anguish. His mother also told him about “people she knew who got blown up or were injured or lost an eye or lost an arm or a leg in bombings”, and about the casualties she attended during her nurses’ training, including those “with bullet wounds, shrapnel, people on death’s doorstep” [39].

In light of the intimate and affective microhistory of the Troubles that he received from his mother, Michael readily admits that her conflict memory narratives “definitely had a big impact on me growing up cos my mum would tell me all these stories about growing up, you know, some things that, looking back on it, are really quite shocking and traumatic for somebody to have grown up in a civil war” [39]. The varied effects of this narrative inheritance become clear as the interview unfolds. To begin with, he recalls how these inherited memories and stories shaped his boyhood sporting allegiances, making him “cheer on for Ireland as much as England, even though Ireland were always the underdogs” [39]. Later, he remembers studying the Troubles as part of his GCSE school curriculum and drawing on the historical “nuance” [39] his mother taught him in order to challenge his teacher’s simplistic claims about Northern nationalists and unionists. More broadly, he affirms that his Northern Irish cultural heritage in general, and his parentally informed knowledge of the Troubles in particular, have moulded his understanding of British history to a considerable extent, making him “much more aware about colonialism and the consequences of colonialism and [. . .] how British imperialism really ravaged the world and caused conflict and oppression in a lot of places, everywhere from [. . .] its nearest neighbour all the way to places like India and Australia” [39].

As this constellation of effects suggests, Michael’s absorption of his mother’s memories and experiences of the Troubles played a significant part in the development of his politicised consciousness. However, he dispels any potential assumption that his postmemorial journey entailed a passive, unquestioning adoption of her opinions by highlighting the tensions that developed between himself and his mother as he began to reflect on and read more about the conflict during his university years in Manchester. In the process, he reveals how his agentive engagement with the conflict memory he inherited actively informs his negotiation of cultural and national identity in England. The chief flashpoint between mother and son was the legitimacy of the political ideology and military strategy of Sinn Féin and the IRA. In contrast to Meghan’s family’s nationalist sympathies, Michael was aware from an early age that his mother was “very contemptuous of Sinn Féin” [39] and regarded those who joined the IRA as “thugs and criminals” [39] who “effectively terrorised their own people” [39]. Although very mindful that he lacked his mother’s “bitter experience of living through a civil war” [39], he nonetheless evolved an outlook that, given the history of British misgovernment in Ireland, was more receptive to the justifications that underlay the republican movement’s resort to militarism and guerrilla warfare in the Six Counties. However, were he to go so far as to suggest that “an armed struggle against [. . .] oppression was justified” [39], “big rows” [39] with his mother would

ensue, rows that he looks back on with an empathic awareness of, and respect for, her experiential perspective:

> I remember her getting angry with me and emotional and saying it's fine for you to say that, you've lived in a peaceful country all your life, you're not from there, you've not had to grow up in a civil war, which is true, you know. It's easy to take a position that's quite idealistic, that can justify violence, if you haven't had to experience it first hand. [39]

The attitude of dispassionate self-appraisal that Michael adopts here also characterises his discussion of his sense of national belonging. When asked how he would self-identify, his succinct reply—"I'd say I'm English, but of Irish heritage" [39]—is notable for its eschewal of the composite or hybrid forms of identification that are a common feature of the narratives of other of our second-generation narrators, including, as we have seen, Meghan Chard. The settled certainty with which Michael agentively compartmentalises the English and Irish components of his identity stands in marked contrast to the restive emotions that buffet Meghan as she discusses her continually competing national and cultural loyalties. Yet while there are no comparable pangs of unease in Michael's oral narrative, he does admit to harbouring feelings of guilt-tinged regret about his neglect of his Irish heritage, which he conceptualises in all-island terms when he says: "if I feel a tension it's that although I claim an Irish lineage and heritage, I'm not really Irish. I haven't done enough to investigate my background and I haven't spent enough time in Ireland. That's something I regret actually. [. . .] It feels like a bit of a deficiency" [39].

When it is put to him that these sentiments imply that certain criteria must be met in order to possess an "authentic" Irish identity, Michael does not demur, thus suggesting that he perceives "true" Irishness as having a locus of origin in the island of Ireland itself. Furthermore, his endorsement of the desirability of second-generation individuals becoming culturally familiar with their ancestral homeland, so as to enhance their affective ties to it, can be read as an implicit critique of the effects of the deterritorialisation of Irish citizenship that accompanied Ireland's late twentieth-century reinvention as a "diaspora nation". As sociologist Ronit Lentin explains, a key driver of this development was the Irish state's expansion of "the notion of 'the Irish nation' in bloodline terms through formally conceptualising Irishness as including the Irish diaspora, a process publicly begun by former president Mary Robinson in the early 1990s" [40] (pp. 434–435). One notable (and, in some quarters, much-maligned) outcome of this transnational turn was the popularisation of what Steve Garner describes as the "'one grandparent' avenue to Irish citizenship", whereby "someone whose grandparent emigrated, and who may never have set foot in Ireland, is unproblematically granted citizenship" [41] (p. 126), an avenue that became positively thronged with British people of Irish descent applying for Irish citizenship following the 2016 Brexit referendum.

As an Irish passport holder of long standing, Michael is sensitive to the charge of having "pretensions to being Irish" [39] levelled at him, hence his reflection that "as an English person, if you've got Irish heritage it's quite easy to wear it on your sleeve. [. . .] I'm sure it's probably tiresome for Northern Irish and Irish people when you get English people or Americans or whatever, you know, claiming to be Irish when they're not really" [39]. His determination to avoid being perceived as one such wannabe accounts for his pointed explanation that he originally obtained his Irish passport for reasons of expediency rather than patriotic fervour, let alone a Brexit-induced desire to retain EU citizenship: "I lost my British passport and I was going on holiday when I was about nineteen, and I needed a passport quickly and it was much quicker to go down the Irish route" [39]. This determination also informs his adopting the polite circumspection of a cultural outsider when asked for his views on what it means to be Irish: "I don't really feel like it's my place to have a very strong view on it in a way because I was born in England, I grew up in England, so yeah, I don't feel like I'm in a position really [. . .] to say what it is to be Irish" [39].

Michael is more forthcoming about the displays of Irish diasporic identity he witnessed during his coming of age in an era in which Irishness was internationally commodified, driven by the socio-economic forces unleashed by the Celtic Tiger phenomenon of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Interestingly, his distaste for the annual spectacle of people "going out and getting really drunk and wearing the big hats and drinking loads of Guinness" [39] on Ireland's national day echoes that of his mother, whom he remembers "taking umbrage with the way that St Patrick's Day had been so commercialised and just turned into a booze festival" [39]. His reflections on other expressions of transnational identification with Ireland, however, are more intimately grounded in his subjective experience of agentively negotiating the discursive boundaries of inclusion and exclusion that delimit the Andersonian imagined community of the nation-state [42].

Like many of our second-generation interviewees, Michael cites occasions when he was taunted about his Irish heritage during his English upbringing. In recalling how classmates in his Runcorn school would "say things like, oh, you know, your ma's a Paddy or, you know, you're a Paddy" [39], he reveals how early in their development English-born children of Irish and Northern Irish parents can become the object of exclusionary discourses of legitimacy that deny them recognition as "genuine" national subjects. Yet it is not the negative psychological impact or polarising social effects of such prejudice that Michael's recollections bring to the fore. Rather, it is the way in which such instances of anti-Irish sentiment in England can expose the entanglements of native and migrant ancestries that a dichotomous ideology of "us" and "them" works to conceal. For, in a rather satisfying plot twist, Michael tells of how the name-calling directed at him in school was abruptly silenced by "this one lad who was the hard knock of the class", who "turned round and he said hey you, shut up, my mum's Irish" [39]. It is a rebuke that is as culturally telling as it is blunt. Just as "mixed" marriages in Northern Ireland undermine perceptions of the province as irrevocably riven by sectarian antagonisms, such declarations of Irish heritage in England subtly disrupt conceptions of English national identity that minimise the ethnic and racial intermixing that has transformed regions such as north-west England into quintessential diaspora spaces [43].

Michael's experience of exclusivist identity discourses was not confined to the classroom. He soon came to understand that English-accented assertions of Irishness resonate differently in Irish national and diasporic settings, where they frequently conflict with prescriptive beliefs about what it is to be Irish. So while it is one thing for Michael to be objectified in England as a "Paddy"—a timeworn stereotype that rendered Irish people as simple-minded and animalistic, and which punctuated British colonial discourse on Ireland during the politically turbulent nineteenth century [44]—it is quite another for him to be labelled a "plastic Paddy", a term of much more recent origin, intended to demean the status of second-generation Irish people in contemporary British and Irish society. As Mary Hickman explains, the latter term was habitually deployed

> in order to deny and denigrate the second generation Irish in Britain; the implication being that if you were not born in Ireland your claim to Irishness lacks authenticity and can safely be ridiculed. This epithet, 'plastic Paddy', came into quite common use in the 1980s, frequently articulated by new middle-class Irish migrants in Britain, for whom it was a means of distancing themselves from established Irish communities. [45] (p. 16)

From this we can see that "plastic Paddy" is a signifier that sits squarely within the cultural politics that surround the "profoundly political questions" that Catherine Nash argues confront those of Irish and Northern Irish heritage across the globe: "who counts as Irish, who belongs in Ireland, and to whom does Ireland belong in terms of citizenship and sovereignty as well as imaginative possession" [46] (p. 264). Marc Scully adds an important caveat by noting that the term "plastic Paddy" has subsequently been appropriated by some second-generation Irish people themselves, who use it "to describe other second-generation people who they feel 'overdo' their Irishness" [47] (p. 128), a point that illustrates how

displays of inauthentic identity are as subject to value-laden judgement as those deemed to be authentic.

Ultimately, of course, deciding what constitutes an excessive performance of cultural identity is a matter of subjective opinion, and Michael voices his when he speaks of his aversion to the essentialist forms of ethnic identification exhibited by some people of Irish and Northern Irish descent. He is especially wary of those who, in an attempt to compensate for the perceived impurity of their Irish affiliations, cultivate a hyper-nationalistic Irishness that brooks no half (or indeed hybrid) measures, and which is often wedded to a mythical nostalgia for a romanticised past. He cites a friend of his as a case in point:

> I've got a mate who's American and he's, you know, proper plastic Paddy, as the term goes, and he must be about fourth-generation Irish and he's, he's really invested in and embedded in and steeped in all the mythology of the Irish struggle. He's got the tattoos, you know, he, he idolises and lionises a lot of these terrorists, frankly, and I find it a bit odd and alien, but again, it's probably because he's so far removed from it. [39]

As Michael's use of the pleasingly oxymoronic phrase "proper plastic Paddy" here suggests, his friend's gendered performance of Irish ethnicity represents a particularly ostentatious example of the type of contrived, anachronistic identity from which Michael, as a second-generation Irish Englishman, recoils. Yet his antipathy does not lead him, as one might expect, to advance a more progressive or revisionist counter-version based on his own more proximate and politically informed ties to his maternal homeland. In fact, Michael shows no desire to stake a claim to Irishness on the basis of inflated credentials, nor does he wish to contest the ingrained presumptions that relegate those of Irish and Northern Irish descent to a subordinate rung on the hierarchy of national belonging. To the contrary, in what is arguably the most striking aspect of his testimony, he shows himself to be at ease with his second-generation status, simply stating that "If someone called me a plastic Paddy I'd just laugh about it because I'd know it's true" [39]. Such a matter-of-fact acceptance of the pejorative "plastic" tag is, if anything, more disarmingly subversive than a forceful repudiation of it, all the more so given Michael's revelation that his own brother once punched an Irish-born friend who dismissively referred to him as "just a plastic Paddy" [39]. Michael's measured remark is the antithesis of such reflexive anger and underscores his emotional and psychological distance from the double consciousness that is such a common feature of other second-generation identity narratives. Far from being tormented by unrequited hankerings after a chimerical authenticity, this "plastic Paddy" declares himself comfortable in his second-generation skin.

7. "I've Always Had a Weird Relationship of, Like, What Am I?": Lauren's Story

As we noted in our introduction, not all of the Northern Irish parents of our second-generation interviewees chose to share their experiences of the Troubles with their offspring. While none of our respondents recalled hearing their parents say that the thirty-year war was best forgotten or not spoken about, several describe a parent who was unwilling to discuss their memories or views of the conflict, a reluctance that sometimes extended to other aspects of their pre-migratory pasts in the North. In most such cases, the reasons for such reticence or "memory management" were unstated by the parent and unfathomable by the child. In contrast to studies of other post-conflict societies where silences surrounding the convulsive past tend to signify unresolved trauma or grief, our interviews yielded little overt evidence that parental reticence about the Troubles was directly attributable to individual or collective trauma, although we are mindful of the many caveats that caution against accepting this observation as definitive. Nor does our interview testimony permit us to say with any certainty whether feelings of pain, anger, shame, guilt, alienation, fatigue or sadness lay behind some parents' aversion to memory sharing; or whether such silences bespoke a desire to consign uncomfortable memories to a past that had become another country, literally as well as metaphorically; or indeed whether some parents felt that the dominant representations of the Troubles (and Northern Irish people themselves) in the English cultural imaginary

made it difficult to express alternative perspectives, even to one's own children, for, as Lucy Newby points out, dominant memory discourses can inhibit "the articulation of memories at a personal level" by making "certain elements of past experience less hearable and speakable than others in the context of the present" [48] (p. 8).

What the oral narratives of these now-adult children do reveal, however, are some of the differential and long-lasting legacies of growing up with parents who shared few memories of the conflict, culture and society that they had left behind. In this closing section of our paper, we examine two such narratives, by Lauren Kane and Rachel Lewis respectively, which unveil the seldom-viewed effects of repressed and negated parental pasts on the negotiation of second-generation identities that are so protean and fragmented as to resist definitive categorisation. In each instance, we are dealing with a daughter whose narrative inheritance from her Northern Irish father is so centrally defined by the partial and incoherent transmission of personal, familial and cultural memory that it creates a void in the daughter's historical consciousness and an acute impasse or aporia in her sense of self. Indeed, in speaking so feelingly of patrimonies constituted around the retention or erasure of memory, Lauren and Rachel vividly exemplify Goodall's observation that "An unfinished narrative is a difficult fact to live with" [21] (p. 498), while at the same time illustrating Hirsch's hypothesis that within the family sphere, silence can be as powerful a generator of postmemory as speech.

Valuable additional analytical insight into the testimonies of these two women may be gleaned from the reflections on the broken transmission of family memory by the French writer Henri Raczymow, several of whose Jewish relatives perished in the Holocaust and who, like Hirsch and Hoffman, endured the psychological burden of living with the aftermath of this catastrophic history. Writing in the mid-1980s, Raczymow contemplated the history and culture of his Polish Jewish family that were reduced to ashes before his birth. He speaks movingly of inheriting mere fragments of this past—a familial and cultural memory "shot through with holes, with missing links" [49] (p. 102)—and of his attempts to recover, through writing, what he identifies as absent memory, a history that was handed down to him "precisely as something *not* handed down" [49] (p. 103). The experiences and emotions Raczymow depicts, particularly his sense of being haunted by the very memory he lacks, provide an illuminating analogue to those revealed by Lauren and Rachel, who possess subjectivities that are shaped around the lineaments of family pasts that are felt but not known. Yet while each interview constitutes a form of postmemory, there are, as we shall see, telling contrasts between these narrators' agentive responses to, and negotiations of, the traces and silences that are the marks of irretrievable loss.

Like several other interviewees in our cohort, Lauren Kane had a childhood that involved serial relocations within Great Britain. Lauren was born in Swansea in 1991 to an English mother and a father from Knockbracken in Belfast, who met in their early twenties while studying at a Bible college in England. Her father's work as a pastor in the Elim Pentecostal Church took him to different ministries, which meant that the family lived in several parts of England before settling in the London suburb of Croydon when Lauren was eleven. When asked by Fearghus about her early memories of her father discussing the Troubles with her, she struggles to remember any specific conversations, saying that "he would talk about things that go on [in Northern Ireland], but it was more stories from him growing up and, like, throwing cowpats at each other in the fields [laughs] after school and things like that" [50]. Such selective remembering has, she admits, left her with minimal knowledge of the conflict and a very limited understanding of Northern Irish history. She goes on to explain that her father's reticence extended to the more recent politics of the North, which were "never really brought up" [50] by him either, something Lauren now finds "a bit weird" [50] in retrospect. Hers is a family, it seems, where there exists an unacknowledged blockage of memory concerning her father's heritage and identity that is still awaiting its working through, leaving the work of postmemory indefinitely stalled.

Elsewhere in her testimony, Lauren, who works as a church administrator in London, offers suggestive clues to the ways in which this resolute but unexplained parental silence

may have contributed to what she describes as the identity "crisis" [50] that unsettled her "even as a kid" [50]. The most notable of these clues is the implicit causal link she establishes between her father's reluctance to speak about the Troubles, her tenuous attachment to her Belfast roots and her inability, in Hirsch's words, "to diminish distance, bridge separation, and facilitate identification and affiliation" [23] (p. 38) by incorporating her father's life story into her own. His unwillingness to share his local knowledge with her may also have influenced Lauren's subconscious perception of Northern Ireland as ambiguous and deceptive territory, a place that is at once proximate, even homely ("just, you know, an hour on the plane, that's not, it's not far, it's part of the UK, it's not any different" [50]) and foreign, almost alien ("quite different from being in Britain really" [50]). Indeed, without her father's inside knowledge, the North could assume an aura of hidden menace and danger, as shown by her memory of an incident that occurred during a day trip to Derry city with her parents in the early 2000s, when she was a teenager.

As she tells it, her mother was more enthusiastic about the trip than her father, who (again) for unspecified reasons, "was always very wary about going into the Catholic areas" [50] of Ulster. He accompanied them nonetheless and seemed at ease until they were walking along the elevated seventeenth-century walls that encircle the old town, when he suddenly jolted Lauren out of her "touristy" [50] mood by pointing to the heart-shaped Union Jack emblem on her T-shirt and advising her to "zip that cardigan up because they'll use that heart as target practice" [50]. While her father's warning amuses her in retrospect, she says it "freaked me out as a kid" [50], not least because who exactly "they" were, and why "they" might want to kill her, remained unexplained, then and thereafter.

Lauren offers a further glimpse of how veiled anxieties traceable to her father's undiscussed Northern Irish past could abruptly intrude upon her self-positioning in England when she recalls an occasion on which a canvasser called to their home and "insisted that because dad was from Northern Ireland, me and my sister were then classed as mixed race" [50]. This assertion appears to have aroused in her father a latent dread of being misrecognised—and therefore delegitimised—as a racialised other in England, prompting him to assert his and his family's unequivocal Britishness ("he was very much, like, no, I'm from the UK" [50]), only for it to be subsequently threatened from within by Lauren herself when she acquired an Irish passport in the wake of the Brexit referendum. Her account of his reaction to her doing so shows the issue of nationality suddenly becoming a flashpoint between father and daughter at a time of heightened political tension throughout the constituent parts of the UK, and when relations between the British and Irish governments were severely strained as the Brexit withdrawal negotiations grew ever more fraught:

> I got my Irish passport, whenever Brexit was happening I signed up for an Irish passport, and cos I had to ask for his birth certificate at the time he was very much, like, why do you, you're not Irish, you don't [laughs], in the end he was, like, okay, it's fine, if it's going to help you, [. . .] but there was a bit of a pushback at the time for, you're from the UK [laughs], you're British, you're not Irish. [50]

Interestingly, this was not the final word on the matter, nor is it the last time the question of national identity crops up in Lauren's interview. Later in the discussion, she reveals that whenever she is asked how she self-identifies, she says she describes herself as British, thus tacitly accepting the singular nationality that her father attributed to her during their passport spat. She makes this disclosure while explaining her attempts to unify the competing elements of her cultural heritage and alleviate her dilemmas of identity and belonging. This explanation in turn brings into view the ontological insecurity that has persistently stalked her, prompting her to outline the reasoning that informs her deliberative choice of British nationality:

> I've always had a weird relationship of, like, what am I? So I was born in Wales, so does that make me Welsh? My dad's Northern Irish, does that make me Northern Irish? Mum's English, so I, I do always say oh I'm British, just cos it, like, incorporates all three of them, cos if you say you're Welsh people say well,

> you were only there for a year when you were a baby, or if then they say oh you're Irish and English, but only really ever going over to Northern Ireland for holidays and things and visiting family, you don't have a strong connection really with, with Northern Ireland I don't think. [50]

The most salient features of this rationale are its pragmatism and its quiet exasperation, both of which are symptomatic of the lack of a sufficiently nuanced and capacious identity category within which Lauren can locate herself in order to make her complex narrative inheritance culturally intelligible or, in Newby's terms, "speakable and hearable". Without this option, she reverts to the unproblematised category of "British", hoping that her adoption of this passable identity will at least be robust enough to withstand social scrutiny. Yet her tone and delivery suggest that this default choice has been made at the expense of an emotionally satisfying harmonisation of her discrepant affiliations into a cohesive whole. Just as her father's circumspection about the Troubles and his Belfast past has bequeathed a knowledge deficit that has short-circuited the formation of postmemory and produced a corresponding lacuna in her subjectivity, Lauren appears to have suppressed rather than reconciled the tensions that gnaw at her sense of selfhood and belonging. Her rather resigned remark towards the end of the interview that "British just seemed to cover it all" [50] suggests an identity that is still more fractured and out of joint than she is prepared to admit, just as she herself is still troubled by a narrative inheritance that is intrinsically defined by absence, disjunction and lack.

8. "I Feel Like I Should Feel Some Kind of Connection to This Place": Rachel's Story

The wrenching effects of living with the haunting presence of absent memory are laid bare even more vividly in the interview testimony of Rachel Lewis, who was born in London in 1995 and works for a management consultancy firm in the city. Like Lauren, Rachel describes persistent feelings of inner unsettlement and identity confusion, which she attributes to her being kept in the dark about her Northern Irish father's life story throughout her formative years. The fact that her father is no longer alive, however, adds the weight of irrevocable loss to her insistent grappling with a narrative inheritance from which so much history and memory are missing. In her bare-bones summary of his life, she explains to Fearghus that her father, who came from Belfast's Jewish community, moved to London in the late 1970s with hopes of becoming a musician, but when these faded he forged a successful career in information technology until his untimely death at the age of fifty-six, when Rachel was sixteen. With manifest regret, she recalls how he told her "very, very little about his childhood" [51] or his later life in Belfast, her tone insinuating that she harbours unresolved feelings of not having been worthy of his trust. Her strongest sense of his Northern Irishness came through his accent, which she says he never "fully lost" [51], although "other people couldn't really hear it unless you were from Northern Ireland, so sometimes we'd meet people who were from Ireland or Northern Ireland and his voice would completely change and it was, like, a part of, like, a secret club" [51], one to which she implicitly did not belong.

The traces of Rachel's father's Jewishness are even more hauntingly imperceptible to her. The one boyhood story she remembers him telling her as a teenager was about a confrontation he had with some other Belfast children, who, on learning that he was Jewish, asked if he was a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew. Her subsequent realisation that this anecdote is a variation on a "really common joke" [51] about Northern Ireland's mutually exclusive religious identities made her "really annoyed" [51] and baffled as to why "he told it like it was something that happened to him" [51]. Rachel's retrospective frustration at such perceived disingenuousness on his part compounds her sense of being shut out from the inner life of a father whose early death precluded the possibility of their having more candid conversations in the future about his Belfast upbringing and the ways in which it shaped him and, by generational extension, her. So while she shares with Lauren a deeply fissured patrimony that prevents her from being able to incorporate her father's life story

into her own, Rachel's agentive position differs in this important respect, which means that she bears a loss that cannot be properly mourned.

Rachel goes on to explain that her desire to discover more about her father's hidden early life and "what it was like in my parents' generation growing up in the Troubles" [51] has in recent years become the impetus for a creative writing project, for which she solicited stories and memories from her Northern Irish Jewish relations, many of whom also relocated to England during the 1970s and 1980s. The strength of their aversion to discussing the Troubles surprised her, however, and even when she managed to persuade them to talk, she found their disclosures to be disappointingly banal and unsubstantial. These evasive and defensive responses lead her to bemoan the fact that "no one ever talked about [the Troubles] while I was growing up, except for this trip to Belfast, which didn't make any sense cos it felt completely out of context" [51]. The visit in question was "a memory lane trip" [51] instigated by her father in 2006 or 2007, during which he took Rachel and her two brothers to places associated with his Belfast youth. Looking back on it, she describes "a very vivid memory" [51] of her father taking them to one of the city's so-called peace walls, which were erected by the British Army during the Troubles to prevent sectarian violence at urban interface areas[8]. It was there, she recalls, that he

> tried to kind of explain the Troubles and we just, and it just, I just remember how much it didn't make any sense to me because he, like, never talked about it at all and I didn't know anything about the history of the Northern Ireland cos it's not something you get taught in school and it's not something he'd ever talked about. [51]

Like Lauren's story of her day trip to Derry with her parents, Rachel's account of her excursion to Belfast with her father shows how visits to the parental homeland could be emotionally perilous occasions for the second generation, as likely to elicit feelings of ambivalent or failed imaginative connection as to yield moments of enlightenment and understanding. Rachel's recollections here also reveal how fundamentally her relationship to her Ulster Jewish heritage is structured around experiences and feelings of loss, dislocation and insufficiency, to an extent that threatens to imperil any "intergenerational effort at reconstitution and repair" [23] (p. 109) on her part, which Hirsch says is a central aspect of the work of postmemory. In reading Rachel's endeavour to make sense of her attenuated narrative inheritance as a postmemorial initiative, therefore, we should bear in mind Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering's observation that while memory is "crucially at stake" [52] (p. 88) in the creation of postmemory, "it is at times a profound sense of loss, rather than memories themselves, which has been most powerfully transmitted" [52] (p. 88). This awareness is necessary because the more Rachel seeks to establish what Hoffman refers to as "a sense of a living connection" [30] (p. xv) to her father's formative experiences in Belfast, the more keenly she feels the dearth of intergenerationally transmitted memory.

Yet Rachel's sense of loss is not absolute, nor are her attempts at "a postmemorial working through" [23] (p. 122) of her gapped narrative inheritance in vain. Although the process of gathering mediated memories of her father and tracking fragmentary traces of his life leads her to generational pasts that lie beyond her conscious reach, her probings nevertheless afford her some clarifying insight into identities that have been progressively attenuated by serial acts of social forgetting and cultural assimilation. This discovery widens Rachel's interpretive framework for understanding her identity through the identities forged by her forebears and helps her to see, in Goodall's terms, her own "life grammar and working logic as an extension of, or a rebellion against" theirs. It also quickens her mediation of her obscured paternal heritage through what Hirsch calls acts of "imaginative investment, projection, and creation", as we shall see.

The earliest of these familial acts of forgetting and assimilation occurred in Belfast, the city to which Rachel's Polish ancestors migrated in the late nineteenth century and where they became, in the pithy phrase of her grandmother, "Protestant Jews" [51], a disclosure that suggests there may have been more truth in her father's aforementioned boyhood anecdote than she previously allowed[9]. Her father appears to have performed a similar

cultural manoeuvre in 1980s London, strategically camouflaging his Northern Irishness in response to the social and psychological challenges he encountered there: "he always felt like he never, he didn't, like, know the right people, or have the right accent, or go to the right school, or have the right background to do well" [51]. Rachel recognises the influence of this family dynamic in her own upbringing, noting that her parents "were both really, really pushy" [51] and "sent all of us to, like, the best private schools they could afford and [. . .] really, really wanted us to go to good universities and come out like perfect English people" [51]. This "double desire for us to assimilate and achieve" [51], which she describes as "a Jewish thing" [51], helps her to understand why her family "never tell any of these Troubles stories or, like, stories about their history" [51], since to do so would be to introduce disruptive notes into a family narrative of upwardly mobile social conformity. This assimilative thrust may also explain her relations' preference for selective remembering and their guarded response to her questions, as by tugging at the threads of hidden genealogies in an attempt to ascertain what made her father's experiences as a Northern Irish Jew distinctive, Rachel is chafing against a transgenerational family proclivity to mute potentially discomfiting memories and modify cultural differences in migrant settings.

Rachel's ongoing postmemorial work testifies to the enduring psychological hold submerged or erased histories of conflict and migration can exert over the consciousness of the second generation, particularly those who, like her, possess few received memories from a parent and have scant firsthand experience of their ancestral heritage. In Rachel's case, her tenuous relationship to her late father's shrouded past, and the multitude of memories that are now forever inaccessible to her, is suffused with unease and perplexity; and yet her desire to gain some measure of agentive mastery over her threadbare narrative inheritance persists. Although she has little experiential connection to her father's early life and migration story, her troubled feelings of cultural severance and "unfinishedness" are so palpable as to be paradoxically generative, fuelling her desire not only to establish an emotionally sustaining connection to her occluded Northern Irish origins, but also to counteract her family's purposeful social amnesia and bear witness to the complex psychological afterlife of that which has been effaced or left untold.

In addition to the already cited work of Marianne Hirsch, Eva Hoffman and others, the insights of the political theorist William James Booth provide further interpretive assistance here. In his study of memory, identity and justice, Booth hypothesises that "the impulse to bear witness is intimately related to fragility, to a silence of memory and of the past, a silence that fuels the witness's sense of the need to bring that past before his contemporaries" [55] (pp. 73–74). He conceptualises these silences as

> a sort of topography: hollows or indentations left by the past, unannounced and mute but awaiting memory's voice, a witness, a poet, an orator, or a monument. They wait for their witnesses, yet at the same time these absences or silences are like the hollows of our experience in that even in their absence they shape what is present and experienced. [55] (p. 74)

That Rachel can be thought of as one such witness is evidenced by her attunement to the enigmatic silences that inhabit the epistemological gaps created by the lack of parentally transmitted memories and by her turning to poetry to contemplate their meanings. Yet she complicates Booth's hypothesis by revealing the profound linguistic and representational challenges of articulating the effects on her sensibility of the absent presences that comprise the inheritance of loss that she says she is "piecing [. . .] together in retrospect" [51]. This comes across not only in what she says, but also in the manifest difficulty she has in giving expression to an inner reality of rupture and disjunction. We hear this, for example, in her reflections on the "weird" [51] emotions that visits to Belfast engender in her: "it's that feeling of a thing that's not a thing, it's like, I feel like I should feel some kind of connection to this place, but I kind of don't have any connection to this place, except the fact that I don't have something and feel like I should, feels like in itself a thing" [51]. She goes on to compare this sensation to "a feeling that I also get around Jewish people sometimes

where I'm, like, I would like to have my step closer than the average person's connection to this acknowledged by you, but I don't think it will be because I don't know how to express that" [51].

Rachel's struggle to find an appropriate vocabulary in which to articulate—to herself as much as to others—the intricacies of her ambivalent feelings about her vestigial Jewish and Northern Irish heritages is again audible in her response to a question about her father's religious habits during her London upbringing, in the course of which she compares her ineffable sense of Jewishness to the experience of being of Northern Irish descent:

> I don't know, it's a very hard feeling to put into words, which is why I'm putting, trying to write some poems about it [. . .]. I think it's a bit similar to being descended from someone who's Northern Irish. It's like a, it's like a thing that's not a thing, it's like, it's migration, but it's not really a migration, you know, you're different, but you're not really different, you're part of it, but you're not really part of it, like a thing that's not really a thing, but you kind of want to tell people, you almost want to be, like, my, I don't know. The best way of phrasing it I always find is, like, my dad's Jewish and my dad's Northern Irish, but [. . .] some people hear that and they're, like, oh so you're Irish, or oh so you're Jewish, and I'm, like, no, that's not what I'm saying, it's like, a bit like, a bit different. [51]

These sentiments disclose a complex structure of feeling generated by Rachel's frustrated need to give comprehensible form and public utterance to a cultural inheritance whose ghostly insubstantiality carries an unsettling impression of experiential authenticity. On first hearing, her sense of ambiguous connection to "a thing that's not really a thing" calls to mind the phenomenon of the phantom limb, whereby an amputated body part continues to be felt or experienced by the person to whom it is no longer attached. Yet this analogy does not quite gel with Rachel's description of feeling severed from something that she never fully possessed in the first place, yet devoutly wishes she did, and without which she feels spiritually and psychically bereft. Perhaps a more fitting analogy is provided by Hoffman's reflections on the psychological and emotional inheritance borne by children of Holocaust survivors. Notwithstanding the very great disparity between the predicament of Hoffman's subjects and that of Rachel, a resonance is discernible between Rachel's ineffable sense of inner discomposure and Hoffman's contention that "the crux of the second generation's difficulty" [30] (p. 66) is "that it has inherited not experience, but its shadows" [30] (p. 66), since it is the ungraspable nature of the past that tantalises Rachel, and, as Hoffman says, "wrestling with shadows can be more frightening, or more confusing, than struggling with solid realities" [30] (p. 66).

In such emotionally fraught circumstances, Rachel's turning to poetry, which brings with it an implicit hope of composing the self through writing, offers a potential means of imaginatively recuperating the disavowed parts of her Ulster Jewish ancestry and identity. Indeed, her stated intention to write some "historically situated poems" [51] chimes with Hirsch's insistence on the centrality of imaginative identification to the dynamics of postmemory, and with Hoffman's assertion that "The urge to rescue, to repair and salve [. . .] can transform itself [. . .] into the re-creative and reconstructive urge, into the desire for creativity and interpretation" [30] (p. 191). Yet Rachel's comments towards the end of her interview imply that her poetry will be less concerned with achieving reparative mastery than with expressing the challenges of conveying, through art, the complex thoughts and emotions brought into being when it is absent rather than actual memory that constitutes one's narrative inheritance. Her statement that "this process of connecting is actually what my poems are going to be about [. . .], it's going to be about the thing that is not a thing" [51], suggests that we can expect poetry that, by self-reflexively foregrounding its "exploratory and probing relation to an unknown past" [22] (p. 247), will thematise "incomprehensibility and presence, a past that will neither fade away nor be integrated into the present" [22] (p. 40). Rachel is, we might say, endeavouring to forge her own paradigm for what Hirsch calls "a diasporic aesthetics of postmemory" [22] (p. 247). Rather than try to fill the gap created by missing memory and experience, Rachel, like Henri Raczymow in a different

historical context, is preparing "to present memory *as* empty [. . .], to restore a non-memory, which by definition cannot be filled in or recovered" [49] (p. 104).

9. Conclusions

Although recent scholarship has profitably highlighted the heterogeneity and malleability of second-generation Irish identities in Britain, research in this field continues to be markedly partitionist in orientation. The varieties of personal, cultural and national identity espoused by the English-raised offspring of Northern Irish parents remain almost wholly unexplored, despite the tacit recognition that this cohort is a potentially rich source of insights into the impact of Troubles memory and its transmission on second-generation identity formation in transcultural contexts. This article has sought to redress this scholarly imbalance by examining the affective and agentive negotiations of inherited conflict memory, and the dearth thereof, by five adult children of Northern Irish parents, as articulated in one-to-one oral history interviews. Given the lack of empirical research into this topic, we have offered detailed close readings of what each narrator reveals about their parents' memory-sharing and storytelling practices and traced the differential impact of these practices, alongside other social and discursive influences, on the narrators' developing sense of who they are and where their affiliations lie.

Since memory is here treated aetiologically, as formative of subjectivity and identity, our readings deploy the concepts of narrative inheritance and postmemory as interpretive tools for analysing respondents' accounts of their reception, evaluation and contestation of parental memories of the Troubles and the significance they attach to them in the present. By attending to the specificities of each life story, we have tried to capture narrators' contextually determined, still-evolving negotiations of inherited conflict memory narratives and the uses to which they put their interpretations of them in their constructions of identity. What emerges from these engagements with different kinds of narrative inheritance is a spectrum of creative postmemory practices and nuanced identity enactments through which we observe narrators agentively positioning themselves in relation to the meanings they attribute to parentally mediated memories of the Troubles, whether shared or withheld, as they navigate their tangled cultural loyalties and affinities. Furthermore, these practices and enactments are, as we have shown, subtly responsive to narrators' changing relationships to their narrative inheritances as their experience and awareness of their own and their parents' lives deepen over the life course.

In training an analytical lens on this understudied second-generation cohort, this article contributes to the developing scholarship on the complex afterlife of the history and memory of the Troubles in Great Britain and to the culture of inclusive remembering that is taking shape in "post-conflict" Northern Ireland, where oral history and storytelling projects have emerged as one of the key means by which hitherto unspoken personal narratives of the conflict are being publicly shared [56,57]. As this memory work expands and diversifies, it is essential that further attention is paid to the transnational and transgenerational remembering (and forgetting) of the Troubles and their multivalent impacts and legacies, a view endorsed by many of our project interviewees, who themselves provide uniquely valuable insights into the complex interrelationship between conflict, memory and migration within the diaspora space of the British and Irish Isles.

In encouraging the collection and analysis of more life-history interviews from this cohort of people, which would provide the basis for wider, comparative studies, we hope the theoretical frameworks and critical approaches we have deployed in this article will inspire future scholars. As we have shown, ours is a methodology that enables a fuller appreciation of how the oral testimonies of individuals who are marginal presences in English society and in the historiography of the Troubles do important historical work by productively diversifying established narratives about second-generation Irishness in England and Britain more generally. Our method of combining the lenses of narrative inheritance and postmemorial narration can, we believe, significantly extend scholarly knowledge of the plural ways in which children of Northern Irish heritage in England

negotiate the complex interface between conflict memory, subjective experience and self-identification under changing historical conditions, thereby deepening understanding of the multiplicity of identity positions that exist within this submerged social group. In view of the manifest need for more empirically in-depth and conceptually nuanced investigative work in this field, we hope that we have created a template to enable such work to take place.

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Notes

1. See also the annotated bibliography maintained by Irish in Britain, the umbrella body for Irish community organisations in Britain, at https://www.irishinbritain.org/what-we-do/publications/bibliography-of-research (accessed on 29 January 2024).
2. Northern Ireland's contested incorporation within the United Kingdom complicates conceptualisations of the permanent or temporary relocation of people from the region to England, Scotland and Wales. Whereas some regard such relocation as population mobility within a unitary British state, others, including most Irish diaspora scholars, conceive of such movement as a form of migration, be it emigration, out-migration or internal migration. This lack of definitional agreement is reflected in the self-identities of our project participants, not all of whom would describe themselves unqualifiedly as migrants.
3. Another well-known aspect of Northern Ireland's politically contested status is the variety of names applied to the state or statelet, each of which implies a particular ideological perspective on the place and its history. In recognition of this, we use the terms "Northern Ireland", "the North of Ireland", "the North", "Ulster" and "the Six Counties" interchangeably in this article.
4. The two remaining members of our cohort are somewhat anomalous in that they were born in Scotland but moved to Northern Ireland as children and were raised and educated there, before migrating to England in adulthood.
5. For a critique of postmemory and a reinterpretation of the concept from an Irish memory studies perspective, see [29].
6. For a discussion of situational and chameleon identities among mixed-race South Asian and white children in Britain, see [35].
7. Although he does not say so in his interview, Paul's being the child of an interdenominational marriage may be a contributory factor in his aversion to being singularly defined.
8. These locational details serve to remind us of the diverse settings in which our interviewees' parents passed on their memories of the Troubles to their children, from intimate domestic spaces to conflict-saturated public sites such as this.
9. The long-entrenched culture of sectarianism between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland has presented formidable challenges for religious and ethnic minorities, including those from Jewish backgrounds. See [53] (pp. 201–225) and [54].

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