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# Fatherhood in the Context of Migration: An Intergenerational Approach<sup>1</sup>

Julia Brannen

## Abstract

This paper examines fatherhood from an intergenerational perspective, focussing on men who grew up in very different societies namely Ireland and Britain and who were fathers in two different historical periods; an older generation who came to the UK from Ireland between the 1940s and 1960s, and their adult sons who were born in the UK in the 1970s and who also became fathers of sons. It analyses the context of migration, and its implications for continuity and change across the generations in relation to social mobility and models of fatherhood and demonstrates how a strong work ethic and the cultural resources of religion and Irish ethnicity are transmitted to the next male generation. The data are drawn from a British study in which thirty generational chains of men were interviewed. The study adopted a biographical approach. In the context of this wider data set and particularly that from the Irish families the experiences of one Irish family are used to illustrate the transmission processes involved. In the family discussed, the cultural resources of an ambitious Irish mother and the strong work ethic of both parents produce upward occupational mobility in the second generation. The higher occupational status of the father is however played out via a male breadwinner model of fatherhood in which the father, like his own father, is driven by work.

## Vaterschaft im Kontext von Migration: Ein intergenerationaler Ansatz

### Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel untersucht Vaterschaftspraktiken unter einer intergenerationalen Perspektive. Im Mittelpunkt stehen Männer, die in sehr unterschiedlichen Gesellschaften, nämlich in Irland und Großbritannien, aufwuchsen und ihre Vaterschaft in unterschiedlichen historischen Kontexten wahrnahmen: eine ältere Generation, die zwischen den 1940er und 1960er Jahren von Irland in das Vereinigte Königreich (VK) emigrierte, und die Generation ihrer erwachsenen Söhne, die in den 1970er Jahren im VK geboren und ebenfalls Väter wurden. Der Artikel analysiert den Migrationskon-

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1 The project 'Fatherhood across three generations: Polish, Irish and white British families' is funded by Economic and Social Research Council and located at Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. The team included Professor Julia Brannen, Ann Mooney, Dr Valerie Wigfall and Dr Violetta Parutis.

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text und die Bedeutung der Migration für die soziale Mobilität und Vaterschaftsvorstellungen der Männer. Dabei werden Kontinuität und Wandel zwischen den Generationen sichtbar; es wird insbesondere die Transmission einer stark ausgeprägten Arbeitsethik, religiöser Vorstellungen und irischer Ethnizität an die Söhne beschrieben. Die empirischen Daten stammen von einer britischen Interviewstudie, in der 30 Fälle von männlichen Generationenabfolgen mit Migrationserfahrung untersucht wurden. Die Studie greift auf einen biographischen Ansatz zurück. Im vorliegenden Artikel wird vor allem auf die Daten der irischen Teilnehmer und im Besonderen einer irischen Familie eingegangen, um die ablaufenden Transmissionsprozesse zu veranschaulichen. In dieser Familie tragen die kulturellen Ressourcen einer ehrgeizigen irischen Mutter und die ausgeprägte Arbeitsethik beider Elternteile zu einer beruflichen Aufwärtsmobilität in der zweiten Generation bei. Der höhere Berufsstatus des Vaters geht dabei einher mit der Praxis eines männlichen Alleinernährermodells, in dem die Lebensführung des Vaters, wie schon die seines eigenen Vaters, vornehmlich von Arbeit bestimmt ist.

## **Introduction**

This article sets out to understand the context and influences of Irish migration to Britain in relation to men's family lives over two generations. The lives of the older generation, referred to henceforth as the grandfathers, were shaped by the disruptions and circumstances associated with being an Irish migrant between 1940 and 1960 while for the younger generation – the fathers – fatherhood was played out in the 1990s and 2000s. The data are drawn from a British study in which thirty generational chains of men were interviewed: eight chains of first generation Polish (migrant) fathers, their fathers (living in Poland), and their sons (plus two chains of second generation Polish fathers); ten chains of second generation Irish fathers, their fathers (born in Ireland) and their sons; ten chains of white British fathers, their fathers (born in the UK) and their sons who were aged 5-18. The study adopted a biographical approach.<sup>2</sup> The article focuses on one intergenerational chain. Firstly, it outlines the approach to the study and briefly puts the migration of the Irish migrant grandfathers in context. Secondly, it compares the life courses of the two generations and the social and economic conditions in which the lives of the grandfathers and fathers unfold. Thirdly, it explores men's accounts of transmission. Finally, it discusses the ways in which the experience of migration from a poor rural society plays out in the lives of the second generation of fathers leading to upward social mobility. It shows how past family history is incorporated into family identity in a different structural context. Despite their upward occupational mobility fathers reproduce similarities in fathering practices to those of their own fathers and retain an Irish identity while putting their own mark upon their identity.

## **Approaches**

The study adopts a life course perspective (Elder/Johnson/Crosnoe 2006; Elder/Giele 2009) in order to understand the experience of fatherhood in the context of the society they live in (the history-biography connection, see Mills 1959). A life course approach examines change and continuity over time in individual behaviour across a whole range of life domains highlighting turning points (Denzin 1989) or shifts of direction. However, knowledge is not only sought at the individual level (Bertaux 1997; Bertaux/Thompson 1997); individual accounts are interpretations set within a social context of factual events (Bertaux 1997). Life stories add nuance to understanding the collectivity of the group situating lives in their social and historical contexts.

In a study applying a generational lens, it is possible to explore how a group compares with an historical cohort linked by particular experiences, as in the case of Irish migrants, and the resources for fatherhood that are transmitted intergenerationally. As Mannheim (1952) suggests, generational time is not only about individuals occupying

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2 The Biographic-interpretive Narrative Interviewing Method (Wengraf 2001) was employed and adapted for the grandfathers' and fathers' interviews. In the first part of the interview, the informants were invited to give a life story. In the second part, they were encouraged to elaborate on salient events/experiences selected by the interviewer from their initial narratives. Using a semi-structured approach, the interviewers then asked about specific issues if they were already covered. The analysis involved an initial separation of the life histories from the interpretive accounts (Wengraf 2001). Attention was given to the narrative context including the interview encounter and present time frames (Brannen/Moss/Mooney 2004).

a similar historical location, it is also about the creation of collective cultures through which continuities and discontinuities are transmitted intergenerationally. Cultures express the tensions between synchronic and diachronic dimensions of 'linked lives' (Elder/Johnson/Crosnoe 2006); how individuals make connections with others horizontally on the basis of belonging to the same age cohort while also relating to other generations across historical time (Mannheim 1952). The fact of belonging to a different historical location has consequences for the experience of being fathered and the parenting of children. As Mannheim (1952) argues, the formative years of childhood and youth are critical in the shaping of common identities, albeit the same events may not impinge on individuals and groups in the same ways. In experiential terms generations hold "divided memories" (Giesen 2004, 22) so that memories of different pasts shape perceptions of the present and the future.

Transmission between family and historical generations varies according to the field in which generational processes occur (Kohli 1999). As emphasised by Bourdieu (1990), the social context in which the idea of a "generation" becomes meaningful is pivotal. Thus intergenerational ambivalences may be stronger in relation to disciplining children but weaker in promoting educational success. However, what passes between generations in families, or is passed on, is often taken for granted since transmission is what people *do* and is embedded in routine everyday practices and relationships (Morgan 1999). The transmission of family resources and cultures can be implicit as well as explicit (Bernstein 1996). The notion of "family habitus" (Bourdieu 1990) denotes a set of dispositions related to particular practices which may lead to regularities in patterns of transmission across family generations (*ibid.*). It may involve "reasonable or common-sense behaviour" – forms of "spontaneity without consciousness", carried out without reflection or fuss by people who are operating according to a "practical logic", an embodied "feel for the game" rather than an explicit plan or strategy (Bourdieu 1975). In the sense that habitus involves "produc[ing] history on the basis of history", dispositions can be cumulative (*ibid.*, 56) and hence become evident in an intergenerational study (Brannen 2006). Habitus demonstrates both the "principle of both continuity and discontinuity" (Wacquant 2008, 267).

Material and cultural transmission also creates, reproduces and transmits family identities. However identities change over the life course and over generations as family members seek to differentiate themselves from one another; that which is transmitted alters as each generation makes its own mark upon what has been passed on to it (Bertaux/Bertaux-Wiame 1997). A greater investment in the transmission of identity is typically evident among those who fear the loss of cultural identity, as in the case of migrants (Delcroix 2000). In this process ambivalences are created as a new generation does better educationally than the parent generation generating new class positions, dispositions and habits which may distance them from the parent generation.

Intergenerational transmission involves the transfer of material resources and services, aspirations, values, practices, social learning, and models of parent-child relations (Bengston/Biblarz/Roberts 2002). Parents' socio-economic status and gender play a key role in the transmission of values and aspirations through the internalization of parents' outlooks on and interests in life (*ibid.*), through communication practices (Bernstein 2000), through investments in children's human capital (Bourdieu 1986; 1990; Vincent/Ball 2006). Children may also seek to be similar or differentiate

themselves through habitual, bodily and visual forms of (dis)identification (Mason 2008). Gender (dis)identification is especially pertinent affecting the emotional quality of parent-child relationships at particular life course phases.

### **The context of Irish migration**

Ireland was a colony of Britain until 1922 when all but its six northern counties achieved independence as the Irish Free State which went on to re-name itself *Ireland* in 1937 and declared itself a republic in 1949. For most of its modern history Ireland has been a poor and rural society with a strong pattern of out migration. In the aftermath of independence it withdrew into itself both economically and culturally and its post-independence failure to develop accelerated rather than stemmed this migration pattern (Garvin 2004). From the 1860s to the 1960s Ireland was Britain's main source of reserve labour (Ryan 2004).<sup>3</sup> The 1950s and 1960s saw the largest outflow of people from Ireland to the UK (Garvey 1985).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, through Ireland's history of close contact with the modern industrial economies of the United States and Britain, migration was part of Irish culture. In the West of Ireland where the land was poor and migration heaviest, migration was part of a growing consciousness of alternative futures. People lost confidence in their own culture and were increasingly influenced by the market and material cultures of the large capitalist economies (Brody 1973). As well as seeking work, Irish migrants were attracted by the bright lights of the big cities (Walter 1999). Most Irish migrants came from the countryside and lacked education and skills. In the years following independence most Irish children had no secondary education and left school at 14; secondary education was not free until the late 1960s (Garvin 2004). Coming from a rural society which had no welfare state, the new migrants joined a very different society; they found work in big cities and in the construction industry (much of which was casualised and unregulated with high accident rates), but they also had access for their children to free primary and secondary education and other universal welfare benefits. Thereby they hoped to carve out a better future for themselves and their families.

### **The life course of the grandfathers**

All but one of the ten grandfathers in the study migrated between 1940 and 1960, half from the West of Ireland. All but one had between four and nine siblings. For most grandfathers the transition to adulthood came early in the life course (Barrett 1999). They were expected to help support their families from an early age even when still at school.

Those who migrated were in the main young and single but, with one exception, too old to benefit from the post war free secondary education in the UK. Six grandfathers left school at 14. One grandfather (of middle class origin) entered secondary education in Ireland and another who joined his migrant parents in England. Those

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3 This was the second main migration wave; the first occurred in the 1840s following the Potato Famine (Salt 2009, 56).

4 Inflows into Britain were among younger people with the exception of the 1950s when the numbers were split between 25-34 and 15-24 groups (Barrett 1999). In the 1960s the age range at migration widened.

who left school in Ireland went into menial, poorly paid jobs with no prospects. All had siblings or other relatives who had already migrated providing them with knowledge of job opportunities and some initial support in Britain. On arrival they found work in the construction industry, the archetypal source of employment for Irishmen in Britain, or in factories (Walter 1999). Several remained in the same occupation and sector all their lives. Several of the men returned to Ireland at least once to try to resettle but returned to Britain after only a short period. It was also not uncommon to send their children back to Ireland. In one case, a grandfather was left in Ireland with his grandmother from the age of 8 to 14.

As migrants, few recalled experiencing discrimination themselves but commented on the widespread discrimination against Irish people that existed at the time (Hickman/Walter 1997; Ryan 2004). From present vantage points most grandfathers constructed in their interviews ‘transformative biographies’ (Phoenix 2008) – presenting themselves as having made something of their lives in Britain, and so dis-identifying with the stereotypical portrait of Irishmen who fell on hard times (typically because of the ‘demon drink’). Proud of being Irish several said they were grateful to Britain for providing them with “a good living”, that is from the perspective of Ireland’s impoverishment at the time they migrated. By contrast their sons, from the perspective of greater current economic affluence (both in Ireland and Britain), reflected on the difficulties their parents had faced as migrants in a particular historical period in which the Irish were strongly discriminated against for political reasons and on account of their “otherness” (accent), their low economic status and willingness to do tough manual work.

Despite feeling they had done “well” for themselves in Britain, only one grandfather was upwardly occupationally mobile compared with his own father. Grandfather O., whose father became a carpenter, qualified as a teacher. He was doubly advantaged in that he arrived in Britain at an age when he was obliged to attend school and he also joined his parents who by then were able to support him while he completed his education. He recalled how as a newly qualified teacher he sought advancement but was forced to teach in Catholic schools in inner cities. On one occasion he went for a teaching post in a private (public) school:

*I could sense that I was a little bit almost like a black man there you know. I could sense there was definitely – these were the governors, these were blue Tories – bloke like me (with Irish name) you know, bloody hell, you know.*

The transition to adulthood was marked by the disruption of family relationships, a lack of qualifications, and the need to find their way in a new society hostile to migrants. This in turn shaped the transition to fatherhood. As migrants they were free to marry in the sense that they were no longer tied to the land and by local customs. However, up to the 1960s, the percentage of the Irish population who was single in all the younger age groups was the highest recorded in any developed country, particularly among men (Hannan 2008). Many Irish migrants never married. Six out of the ten Irish grandfathers became fathers in their mid-20s, early in the life course by Irish standards (Hannan 2008). Because of factors to do with religion, marginalisation and ghettoization in Irish communities, many Irish in Britain (all but one in the study)

married Irish women whom they had met either in Irish dance halls in Britain or on visits back home.

Brought up in a strongly religious environment in Ireland, the lives of this generation were dominated by the Roman Catholic Church. Fatherhood was therefore predicated on a Catholic culture influencing family planning and how they brought up their children. Since the Church forbade the use of contraception, parenthood was expected automatically to follow marriage. Eight of the ten grandfathers had their first child within one year of marriage. However, compared with their families of origin this generation had significantly fewer children; 3.2 children on average compared with 6.6 in their families of origin.

Decisions about when to marry were influenced by the need for men to prove themselves good workers. The work ethic was the defining feature of their identities and a major source of male pride:

*I love working. I don't like hanging around to be quite honest. I think if I was out of work I would feel terrible, I really would. (Grandfather G.)*

Being the main breadwinner in his family was “just a natural thing really you know”. Grandfather G. worked all over the country in his job and sometimes had to stay away from home for weeks at a time. Especially when the children were young, he did not spend much time with his family:

*... used to work Saturday and Sunday ... used to work as much overtime as I could ... you know hard bringing a family up when you don't have much money.*

Grandfather M. recalled having to work long hours labouring on the motorways. With hindsight and in the context of taking part in a study of fathers he reflected that he did not meet the current standards of fatherhood:

*At that time it was all about getting the money really to – put[ting] the food on the table really ... and pay your mortgage. That's really a big concern at that stage.*

Grandfathers also experienced financial pressures to support their parents and their siblings back home, some continuing to do this over their working lives. Remittances may have influenced marriage decisions and the timing of marriage although none made this link.

In deciding to marry (and hence to have a family) they had to find suitable housing. Several described discrimination from landlords; they used to say at that time “No blacks, no dogs, no Irish.” Starting married life meant living in single rooms and sharing bathrooms. The two routes out of this situation were to be rehoused by the council<sup>5</sup> or to purchase run down housing and renovate it through drawing on their own skills or the informal economy in the building industry. Since the grandfathers (and their wives) moved in Irish circles not only in the workplace but also in Irish

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5 Several later purchased their council houses under Thatcher's ‘right to buy’ scheme in the 1980s.



communities, the Church and schools provided support for parenting. As one grandfather noted: "Being part of that community is kind of home from home with all the attractions of a big city."

### **The life course of the fathers**

The transition to adulthood for their sons born in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s was very different. While their fathers enjoyed a short period of youth, the fathers experienced an extended youth period which was marked by social if not financial independence – 'young adulthood' (Nilsen/das Dores Guerreiro/Brannen 2002). These men's memories of their childhood suggest security and stability even if money was short. Several recalled growing up in poor housing in Irish communities, and attending Catholic schools where they met other second generation Irish. They also fondly recalled annual pilgrimages made with their families to Ireland in the holidays.

The fathers benefited from better educational opportunities; they left school much later than their fathers – all but one beyond the minimum school leaving age of 16. All gained some qualifications and six a university degree. As a consequence, they attained higher status jobs as the research evidence on second generation Irish in Britain also suggests.<sup>6</sup> Only one started in a manual job (in the construction industry) but rose to a management position and gained some qualifications. The two fathers whose fathers were in middle class professional jobs entered even more prestigious professions.<sup>7</sup>

The transition to fatherhood of the second generation differs also. In all but one case the fathers married at an older age compared with their fathers. Also most fathers experienced a longer period between marriage and fatherhood than their own fathers (two or more years following marriage compared with only one year for their fathers). Like their fathers, most married Irish women and because of their religious backgrounds most brought up their children as Roman Catholics and sent them to Catholic schools.

In order to examine the processes underlying these generational shifts we now turn to analyse the "case" of a grandfather, father and son. This case is typical in many respects of the Irish chains of grandfathers and fathers studied (with the exception of the middle class origin grandfather). It is however less typical in terms of the part played by the grandmother.

### **Life course comparisons**

Grandfather Seamas was born in the 1940s in the West of Ireland on a small farm, the second of six children. The family lived in one room of a two roomed cottage. Seamas' parents had worked in England but returned to Ireland during World War II. Seamas was seven when his mother died, leaving his father to raise six children, including two toddlers and a baby. An unmarried relative was asked to come back from

6 Longitudinal Study data of 1971-81-91 (Walter 1999) shows unusually high rates of upward mobility for second generation Irish, especially those with two Irish-born parents.

7 Despite social mobility considerable health disadvantage is reported for second generation Irish as for first generation that is compared with white British (Williams/Scob 1999). Harding and Balarajan (1996) found health disadvantage to be unrelated to social class. However, little is known about those second generation who do not identify as Irish.

England to care for them.<sup>8</sup> Aged nine, Seamas' father left for England to work, returning for visits once or twice a year. Seamas had few memories of his father: "It was a hard, hard life, now I tell you."

Seamas did not remember missing him; he had never seen much of him and anyway everyone was in the same boat, "that's just the way it was". He remembered no social life, no activities other than occasional games of cards on visits to kin.

Seamas' life course is typical of the first generation Irish. His transition to adulthood came early. When Seamas was 13 his older brother left for England to find work and a year later when he was 14 Seamas had to leave school. He helped run the farm and did various odd jobs. Aged 17, Seamas went to England with a friend to look for work. He worked on various large construction projects all over the country but based himself in London. Some years later he bought a road making machine and became self-employed. Intending initially to return to Ireland he got used to the "good money". Moreover, his family back in Ireland depended on his remittances.

Aged 23, he married an Irish girl he met at an Irish dance hall in London. He was making good money in the construction industry but was not yet on the housing ladder. First, the couple lived in a rented room sharing the house with several Irish families. Their first child was born there when Seamas was 24. After five years and a second child the couple had saved enough money to put down a deposit on a large run down property. By this time Seamas' wife who was business minded was working part time. Later, she set up her own building company, which was atypical both for her time and compared with the other cases. This did not influence Seamas' view of himself as the family breadwinner, albeit it meant the family was relatively well off as a consequence. The couple refurbished the property with help from family and friends over several years. Work remained at the centre of Seamas' identity; he worked long hours, often seven days a week, with periods away from home. He was still working at the time we interviewed him. From his current vantage point, his definition of a "good father" has an old fashioned ring to it:

*... suppose, make sure they're provided and that they have everything they want and looked after. That they get good schooling and ... they're well reared and looked after I suppose. They're clean and kept well.*

Seamas was proud of being a provider:

*They have been to every country nearly in the world, you know what I mean, around with school holidays and with trips and things that (inaudible) I never even heard of, you know.*

It was his wife, he said, who had influenced the children's aspirations and career choices and been the disciplinarian. Seamas positioned himself as "the easy one".

Compare this life course trajectory with that of Seamas' son, Willie. Willie, the second of two children, was born in the 1970s. He attended the local Catholic primary school along with many Irish origin children. On the advice of his mother's friend, he went to a "good" Catholic secondary school some distance from home and studied

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8 The female relative never married.

subjects compatible with his career choice in banking. Unlike his father, Willie experienced a “long period of youth”. At 18 he went to university. He enjoyed considerable upward mobility through entry to the finance industry which was booming at the time (the 1990s); he joined an Irish bank, drawing on the social capital of his Irish heritage. There he met his wife to be, also of Irish origin.

Aged 29, the couple married and two years later their son was born (eight at interview). Two more children followed. Willie became a father later in the life course than his father and under much more favourable material conditions. By then, with two incomes from a well-paid industry, they had already bought their own house. Like his father, Willie’s life was driven by work. He too worked very long hours and was often away from home and so lacked time for his children. However, despite the fact that Willie had a university education and was in a management job, he and his family continued to live within a stone’s throw of his parents where Willie had grown up. He also sent his children to his former Catholic primary school.

The accounts of the two men mirror one another. Seamas said that communication between them was limited when Willie was a child mainly because he (Seamas) was always working, a pattern which continued into adulthood. Like Seamas, Willie did not recall his father spending much time with his father as a child: “he was never there”, noting the similarities with his own fathering: “they’ll be in bed by the time I’m home.” Willie’s memory of his relationship with his father while he was growing up confirmed his father’s account – “non-confrontational” and sticking to “nice easy soft subjects which remains the case now”. Willie confirmed that his mother was the driving force in his life: “Dad didn’t have a clue the school even existed.”

Both, father and son described living in different worlds on account of their work and interests, using the same words. Seamas referred obliquely to differences in their education and occupations “you know we’re in different worlds, kind of thing now” while Willie noted:

*... it was totally different to the world they came from – so they’re (parents) both in construction. I went into the financial industry and um, I’m sure no more than I didn’t know what they did – to a technical level they don’t have a clue what I do.*

While there are similarities in terms of their unavailability as fathers, Willie also subscribed to some aspects of a modern discourse of “fathering” (Brannen/Nilsen 2006) – in particular relational aspects such as communication, openness and closeness (Dermott 2008), while accepting that his fatherhood practice was confined to breadwinning and involved little childcare and spending time with his children only at weekends.

*I honestly think there’s more of a conscious effort for the father [today] to have more one to one time with the children than previously and probably get more engaged in what the children are up to and how they’re developing.*

Willie considered himself “slightly more engaged” with his first born than his father was with him at the same age, for example knowing more about his son’s school and friends. At the same time, he suggested a similar segregation of marital roles for his

own and his parents' marriage. He was however somewhat ambivalent about greater father involvement, as were some other strongly work-focussed fathers of this generation.

While Willie spent little time with his children except at weekends, because of greater affluence and his particular skills he engaged in a wider range of activities (computers, physical activities and taking them out) with his children than his own father had done with him. But unlike his father he was more educationally ambitious for his children and thought he was stricter with them. However, it was his wife who helped with the children's homework.

### **Transmission between fathers and sons**

Possible explanations for Willie's rejection of modern fatherhood practice (though not its ideology) and his defence of a traditional male breadwinner role include the life course experience shaped by his family history of migration which created a need to build a better life for himself and his family. A further clue lies in the cultural sphere of 'family identity' (as part of family memory) which is marked in this family by strong continuities. Given that original identities play a pivotal role in constructing biographical continuities, it is significant that Willie did not break with religious tradition, that he married into an Irish family, that he still felt Irish, and that he stayed geographically close to his parents.

The transmission of identity is however habitual and not necessarily open to reflection, as may be seen in the way Seamas responded to questions relating to transmission in the interview. Seamas could not think what he had inherited from his father nor how he had influenced Willie except that he wanted a better life for him, just as his had been better than his father's.

*I didn't want him to go out working like (inaudible) you know what I mean working. It was great, he had school, he had a good childhood, you know what I mean.*

However, Seamas pointed to aspects of identification, claiming his children and their families as Irish:

*They're all Irish, they've always you know (pause) they've always been round with Irish and their friends here are Irish or Irish descent.*

Seamas also asserted their similar tastes describing how father and son both enjoyed a pint and watching Gaelic football together. Also striking is the fact that Willie continues to live near his parents in the same, now gentrified, community where he grew up. But despite this communication between father and son was limited. Seamas commented, emphasising the value he attached to 'long hours':

*We don't really, we don't communicate much better now, no. Well I don't see him to be honest, he's always – you know we're in different worlds, kind of thing now ... but I mean he does his own thing. He works good long hours actually.*

On the other hand, living so close Seamas helped Willie and his family with practical matters. For their part, both, his son and his grandsons helped Seamas with computers. Moreover, close contact between the female generations was maintained.

Similarly, Willie suggested strong themes of Irish identity. He holds an Irish passport and counted himself as Irish while at the same time integrating country of birth and residence into his identity:

*Depends if it's convenient to be one or t'other. Um, yeah I would see myself as Irish. But it depends on who it's going to annoy most typically.*

He remained a Catholic and a church goer, if an infrequent one. Willie gave a rich account of the mainly cultural capital passed on both by his parents, referring to their strong work ethic which he also wanted for his children. Like his father he spoke of family resemblances (Mason 2008), noting his delight at having been stopped in the street by someone remarking on his own son's resemblance to his grandfather. He also felt that he had inherited his father's social skills ("social demeanour") and he identified with his father's equal treatment of others:

*I don't give two hoots if you earn two grand a year or two million quid a year. I will treat you exactly the same. I think that's a big thing I've probably got from him (pause) and then to a degree socialising in places that serve alcohol is probably another major thing.*

Among others, Willie saw his parents as role models for his children:

*... between us spending hundreds of hours a week with them (Mm) um, by the way you act, by the way you talk – the views you have – how you encourage them to discuss their views and develop their views – all of that will have a huge consequence on them probably.*

At the same time, he stressed that his parents did not intervene in areas such as religious upbringing or education.

For his part Willie said he had no fixed ambitions for his sons; he would like to give them financial stability without handing everything to them on a plate. To some extent his easy-going attitude is like his father's:

*My level of empathy is you know short of having a limb hanging off, you know, I'm not really worried about what happens to you, because it'll be all right tomorrow ... (wife) thinks I'm an emotional retard.*

Reflecting at the end of the interview, Willie showed his awareness of the historical context which created discontinuity between his own life and that of his father. His narrative demonstrates a detailed understanding of what it meant for men like his father to migrate at that time, while he positions himself and his son in a very different world:

*To my mind I was brought up in a totally different economic environment to my parents. I could not dream of leaving home at 13, by myself, going to foreign country, finding work maybe through friends and neighbours, full time working, living in a room with two or three others who I may or may not know, and knowing that there's no cheap Ryanair flight home ... it's a totally, totally different world, you know. I think for both of them there was a lack of education, formal education. Neither of them are stupid by a long shot, but you know to my mind I was brought up in a totally different world to the world they came from and the world they experienced, especially from like the ages of twelve, thirteen onwards ... and I don't know if this changes from generation to generation, but I just don't see that same leap happening between the childhood I had and the childhood my kids are having.*

Interestingly, Willie's eight year old son, Michael, expressed some resistance to his father's practices. He said he did not want the same kind of job and thought his father had to work too hard and too long hours.

*... because sometimes he's in a meeting and when there's an argument then sometimes he isn't back till like two, three (in the morning) ... which I get really annoyed with.*

Michael gave a consistent and graphic account which confirmed what he saw to be the negative impact of his father's work on family life. In response to one of the interview activity sheets concerning "Time with my dad", Michael ticked the box "I would like more time" and wrote down next to it very carefully "because I do not get to see him often because he is at work". Asked to complete the sentence "I like my dad when –", Michael said cautiously: "When he (pause) when (pause) when he's home from work early. I don't when he's not home early." He talked about having to pack in lots of things over the recent bank holiday as his dad had to go to work the next day. Michael also commented on the household's gendered division of labour. Asked about who did which activities in the home, he ticked few done by his father and was rather critical of this, suggesting his father needed more practice, especially with cooking.

There are also discontinuities here in ethnic identification in the third generation. When Michael was asked "Where do you say you are from if someone asks you?" he was disdainful about being asked such "nosy questions" but said that since he sounded English he would say "English". However, at the same time, he was clearly well aware of his Irish connections.

## **Discussion**

This paper has examined how historical circumstances and the migration experience of first generation Irish grandfathers created discontinuity in the second generation of fathers in relation to education and occupation. The case of an Irish grandfather and son shows how the structural contexts of migration and countries of origin and in migration play out over time and in family memory. Compared with their working class counterparts in our study (Brannen/Mooney/Wigfall 2011) the migration experi-

ence of the Irish grandfathers put them initially at great material and cultural disadvantage in Britain: earlier transition to adulthood, less education, no qualifications, less material or other support as young single men in Britain, concentration in a dangerous industry, and the experience of discrimination. For religious reasons, the transition to parenthood followed closely on the heels of marriage and, because of discrimination, was accompanied by difficulties finding suitable family housing. As main breadwinners in their households, they described themselves as “absent fathers”, a view influenced by their consciousness of present day normative discourses of “involved fatherhood”. Moreover this pattern of fathering was sustained by a gendered division of labour in which mothers ran the households and did most of the child care. Unable to help with their children’s academic studies because of their own lack of education, grandfathers looked to Catholic schools and religion to help them bring up their children “properly”. On the other hand, because of their origins in a very poor rural society they defined themselves in terms of a very strong male breadwinner work ethic.

However, grandfathers did not pass on their own disadvantages to their sons but gave them stable if not materially well endowed childhoods. In Willie’s case, as in the other Irish cases, the spur to work hard was transmitted to the fathers through their parents while encouragement to succeed in education came largely from their mothers, especially in Willie’s case. The institutional context of Roman Catholic schools was a further important feature which facilitated their educational success. Circumscribed by their Irish families, communities and religious schools, the changed historical context and institutional fabric in which sons grew up facilitated a different life course pattern, enabling them to attain qualifications, and in the longer term high status professional or managerial jobs (with one exception). This in turn led to later transitions to fatherhood by which time fathers were established on housing ladders.<sup>9</sup>

However, despite their upward occupational mobility, the fathers (with the same one exception) practiced fatherhood in a way not dissimilar from that of their fathers, involving little responsibility or “hands on” caring for children. They were either sole or main breadwinners in their households although, according to the discourse of gender equality, they did not see this as important. Like their fathers, because of long working hours they had limited time for family life, a pattern reinforced by the commitment of mothers in caring for children and also by a degree of precariousness in current labour markets. While the two contexts of employment differed, both male generations experienced insecurity. The grandfathers were employed in the 1960s and 1970s in the construction industry large parts of which were casual with little unionisation or regulation (Clegg 1979 *passim*) while the fathers, employed in the 1990s and 2000s, experienced widespread deregulation of the UK economy, bringing job insecurity and work intensification into many higher status jobs (Lewis/Brannen/Nilsen 2009). However the fathers’ higher educational level and income provided them with many more opportunities which protected them in the context of unemployment.

As discussed elsewhere (Brannen/Nilsen 2006), structural context and change in fatherhood practices are configured differently for different social classes. Commonly middle class fathers today embrace the “new fathering” discourse of father involve-

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<sup>9</sup> Since the 1980s, when the public housing stock shrank under Thatcherism and when council tenants were given “the right to buy”, people aspired to buy their homes.

ment and relationality (see for example Dermott 2008). So, too, the second generation Irish fathers subscribed to this normative discourse. As in the case of middle class Willie whose time at home was heavily constrained by his career, his upward occupational mobility was not accompanied by significant changes in his fatherhood practice. Only one second generation Irish father, a lone parent, shared the care of his two children on an equal basis (with his ex-wife). Significantly he was in a low status (administrative) job. In this case a succession of life course events led to a different trajectory; a failure to fulfil his academic potential despite having gained some passes in the General Certificate of Secondary Education examination which is taken at 16<sup>10</sup>; a move away from Catholicism in adolescence; marriage outside the Irish community; and difficulty developing a career. A decisive turning point was the break-up of his marriage at which time he was faced with a critical decision namely to share the care of his children and not to prioritise work.

The upward occupational mobility of the second generation raises questions about how the families managed the structural ambivalence (Luescher 2005) between the generations. In Willie's case, as in all but one of the Irish cases, as a son of a migrant it was the transmission of a will to succeed in education and the workplace which appears to have been significant in reproducing particular fatherhood practices. Structural ambivalence is also mediated via the transmission of cultural resources which form part of the migrant family heritage in particular through the persistence of a strong sense of Irish identity. Like Willie, the fathers' "Irishness" was sustained in their childhoods through growing up in Irish communities in the UK and annual pilgrimages made with parents to Ireland in the summer holidays. Irish identity also continued to be closely entwined with religious identity (Bruce et al. 2004, 13) but did not preclude identification with Britain. Irish identity was transmitted between fathers and sons sometimes through passing on Irish names; and importantly via cultural performance such as going to church and cultural centres some of which pertained to particular forms of masculinity; having "a pint" together at the pub, watching and playing particular Gaelic sports, a mutual interest in Irish music. The two generations also pointed to the transmission of gendered family dispositions and resemblances manifest in references to similar appearance, character and manner, propensities for sociability and competence in "talking the talk" (an iconic Irish characteristic), as in the case of Seamas and Willie. These forms of transmitted cultural capital are the means by which Irish male generations created a shared history in the context of the migration experience.

At the same time, as in Willie's case, structural ambivalences of social mobility were not entirely reconciled at a personal level. Willie constructed his world as very different from that of his migrant father, while also being conscious that this was part of his heritage. There were therefore clear differences between the generations in a Mannheimian sense. The second generation viewed their parents as members of a particular generation which was shaped both by the harshness of their early lives in Ireland and by their experiences as migrants in a hostile society in which they had to work very hard "to get by" – issues which few of the older generation were willing to dwell upon in their interviews. In that sense migration was a clear generational mark-

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10 Pupils took these examinations at 16 and many left school at this stage.



er for the Irish grandfathers while the more linear life course of their sons was shaped by the pursuit of achievement and material progress.

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