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A prerequisite to any review of contemporary Irish migration to Australia is the positioning of these contemporary trends in the broader context of the historical contribution made by the Irish to Australia's demographic composition. This contribution dates back to the commencement of European settlement in 1788 and has continued in ebbs and flows to current times. At its peak, during the period 1788 through to the early twentieth century, Irish-born migrants accounted for 25% of Australia's newcomers, a proportion which was unmatched by Irish migrants in receiving countries elsewhere in the world. These figures are quite remarkable given that Australia was the recipient of only 5% of the total Irish exodus during this period. Furthermore, despite a much greater volume of Irish immigrants to the US (65% of total Irish emigrants), these immigrants accounted for only 10% of America's newcomers (MacDonagh, 1986:124).

Post-war changes in Australia's migrant intake policies have resulted in a contemporary demographic landscape which is multi-cultural and diverse, one in which the Irish now constitute a much smaller proportion of the total migrant population. The net settler intake from the whole of Ireland in the period 1945-98 is estimated by Price (1998) to be about 115,200, around 2.4% of settler migration (DIMA, 2000 a:1). Reduced migrant flows from Ireland, combined with return migration and mortality among the pre-war and early post-war migrants, means that at the time of the 1996 census there were 51,501 Ireland-born persons (DIMA, 2000 a:1) and 22,940 Northern Ireland-born persons (DIMA, 2000 b:3) in Australia, representing less than 1% of the total population. These figures need to be set in the context of the global Irish-born Diaspora figure which was estimated to be in the region of 1.143 million in 1991. In that same year, the Irish Republic's sending community had a population which was just three times greater at 3.526 million (Courtney, 2000:288).

The number of permanent arrivals from Ireland belies the full extent of the Irish-born presence in contemporary Australia. In the financial year 1999-00, only 740 permanent Ireland-born arrivals are recorded (DIMIA, 2002:11). The net intake for the period is reduced to 403 when the 337 permanent departures in that period are considered (DIMIA, 2002:1). However, these low intake levels are juxtaposed with high temporary entrant levels. In December 2001, 16,089 temporary Ireland-born entrants were recorded (DIMIA, 2002:19). These include students, temporary residents (working holiday and temporary business visa holders) and visitors. Some of these visas entitle the holder to remain in Australia for periods ranging from 3 months to 4 years. The volume of Irish entrants under these heading begs the question of what is a migration and specifically what is an Irish migrant?

Furthermore, as O'Farrell (2000:313) points out the new Irish in Australia are not a homogenous group in terms of pre-migration origin. Since partition in 1920, Ireland

is, in fact, comprised of two separate source areas, namely Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. While, in Australia, the label “Irish” is conventionally applied to persons from both these areas, difficulties exist in relation to the Northern Ireland component not only because of their political and statistical aggregation under the broader UK label, but also because of an internally differentiated “Irish” and “British” identity which exists within this group. The growth in importance of Great Britain as a destination for post-1950 Irish migrants has also meant that Great Britain has been a significant source area for many Australian-bound Irish migrants in contemporary times. Furthermore, the participation of the Irish in the global workforce has produced a transnational Irish migratory group, some of whom arrive in Australia having first been migrants in several countries outside Ireland.

The case study which I am reporting in this paper deals with a subset of this very diverse group. It focuses on migrants who have come to Australia from both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic since 1980. A start date of 1980 was selected because of its significance in both Australian and Irish migration terms. The early 1980s saw, from Australia’s perspective, the cessation of the assisted passage scheme while, in Ireland, it heralded a resurgence of emigration following a decade of net immigration in the 1970s. The study’s 2001 cut-off date facilitates the review of trends through a period in Australia’s history which saw the application and modification of the points entry system (first introduced in 1979(Madden & Young, 1993:5)), and which spans, from the Irish perspective, two contrasting periods, namely, the period of peak contemporary outflow from Ireland in the late 1980s and the period of rapid economic growth from the mid-1990s, labelled the Celtic Tiger.

The culling criteria used in the selection of study participants required that (a) migrants must not have lived in a country outside Ireland before coming to Australia, (b) they must have been 18 years or older on arrival and (c) they must now be resident in the Greater Melbourne area. Participants were acquired using a snowballing technique, a method which involves locating one potential interviewee and seeking introduction to other potential interviewees from this initial contact. A total of 203 interviews have been completed.

A brief overview of these interviewees follows:

- Of the 203 interviewees, 119 (59%) were from the Irish Republic and 84 (41%) from Northern Ireland. At the time of the 1996 Census, there were 4069 post-1981 arrivals of all ages resident in Melbourne. The proportion of Irish Republic to Northern Ireland in this group was 80% and 20% respectively. Within their homeland, these proportions are 70% and 30% respectively
- The gender breakdown of the sample was roughly equal
- The age at interview ranged from 24-68 years, with the majority (53%) aged 35-44 years
- Age on arrival ranged from 18-54 years, with the majority of arrivals (55%) aged 25-34 years. It is interesting to note that this pattern differs from the general age profile which characterised migrant outflow from the Irish Republic during this period, with 15-24 year olds being the age groups most affected by migration in 1987-1998 (Courtney, 2000:303). However, the

sample' profile is more consistent with the age ranking of the 1996 Census profile of Greater Melbourne's post-1981 Ireland-born immigrants. The 25-34 age group was the largest cohort at that time, constituting 31% of the Ireland-born population (ABS, Custom table).

- The majority of interviewees arrived between 1985-89, a pattern consistent with peak Irish migration during this period.
- 71% of interviewees were parent(s) with children, 24% were couples without children and 5% were not in a relationship at the time of interview
- Family status on arrival reflected a different pattern. On arrival, 40% of interviewees were not in a relationship, 28% were couples without children and 32% were parents with children. A higher proportion of the Northern Ireland group arrived as parents with children (42% as compared with 24% from Southern Ireland). The greatest proportion of interviewees from the Irish Republic arrived without a partner or children (Table 1).

Table 1: Family Status of Interviewees by Area of Origin

Family status on arrival:	Total Sample %	Irish Republic %	Northern Ireland %
Not in relationship	40	44	36
Couple (married/de facto)	28	32	23
Parent(s) with children	32	24	42
Total %	100	100	100
Total number of cases	203	119	84

Source: Interview questionnaire survey of post-1980 arrivals

Note 1: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

When these family status categories are examined by gender some interesting patterns emerge. Within the Irish Republic group, there is a similar distribution by gender within the various family status categories. However, in marked contrast, the majority of females from Northern Ireland arrived as parents with children while almost half the males arrived without a partner or children (Table 2).

Table 2: Family Status of Interviewees by Gender and Area of Origin

<i>Family Status:</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>		<i>Irish Republic</i>		<i>Northern Ireland</i>	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
	n=103	n=100	n=58	n=61	n=45	n=39
Not in relationship	45	36	41	46	49	21
Couple (Married /de facto)	27	29	33	31	20	26
Parent(s) with children	28	35	26	23	31	54
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Interview questionnaire survey of post-1980 arrivals

Note 1: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

- ***Visa status on arrival.***

As Table 3 shows, the majority of the study participants arrived on permanent residency visas. Of the 119 participants who arrived under this category, 85% acquired their visa primarily on the basis of skills, either their own or that of their partner while the remainder (15%) did so on relational grounds. The number of participants who initially arrived on working holiday visas is particularly worthy of note. Comprising almost one-third of the sample, these 64 working holiday visa entrants who subsequently became category jumpers, acquired residency through two main means. Sixty-six percent did so on the basis of skills while 34% did so on relationship grounds, with marginally more males than females in this relationship category.

Table 3: Visa Category on Arrival

<i>Characteristic:</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>	<i>Irish Republic Component</i>	<i>NI Component</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Permanent resident	59	54	66
Working holiday	32	35	26
Other	10	11	8
Total %	101	100	100
Total number of cases	203	119	84

Source: Interview questionnaire survey of post-1980 immigrants

Note: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

- ***Education.***

The educational profile of the study group is shown in Table 4. The majority of interviewees had achieved some form of post-primary qualification. For males, this consisted mainly of trade certificate and university/post-graduate level qualifications. For females, the main categories were other tertiary, including nursing and university/post-graduate qualifications.

The high level of skills among these immigrants reflects the labour demands of Australian society in the 1980s and 1990s for occupations such as nurses and tradespersons. The Irish were, in turn, able to meet the demands of the Australian points system because of the expansion of third level education in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s. A further consequence of this educational investment is the increasingly higher proportion of graduates in contemporary Irish migrant streams, a phenomenon often labelled “new wave” Irish migration. In this study, one-third of respondents held university/ post-graduate qualifications. The proportion of graduates in the study group is roughly consistent with the proportion of graduates in Greater Melbourne’s post-1981 Irish community at the time of the 1996 census. A difficulty arises in comparing the study’s two remaining qualification categories with the 1996 census data particularly in relation to nursing because of the difference in qualification bases in Australia and Ireland respectively.

For the majority of interviewees, their qualifications were acquired in their homeland. It is interesting to note, however, that many of these interviewees have

undertaken further study in Australia. Of the 60 persons holding university/post-graduate qualifications, 22% had achieved their qualification in Australia while a further 22% have a university/post-graduate qualification pending. Twenty-nine percent of the 65 persons in the other tertiary category had acquired their qualification in Australia.

Table 4: Highest level of Education

<i>Highest education level:</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Primary – completed second level	19	17	22
University and post-graduate	30	29	30
Other tertiary (including nursing)	32	19	45
Trade certificate	19	35	3
Total percentage	100	100	100
Total number of cases	203	103	100

Source: Interview questionnaire survey of post-1980 immigrants

Note: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

- ***Occupational Status.***

In reviewing the occupational characteristics of migrants, it is important to do so in the context of both pre-migration and post-migration status as migration may be a vehicle of upward or downward mobility. The ABS ASCO (2nd ed) codes have been used in the analysis of the study's occupational data.

Pre-migration occupational status (table 5) indicates that the majority of interviewees were in the professional/managerial/advanced clerical category (55%). Trades & related workers are ranked second (23%). When these occupational categories are disaggregated by gender, females are shown to have held predominantly professional/managerial/advanced clerical positions in their homeland (71%). Trades & related workers accounted for the greatest proportion of male workers (44%), followed by professional/managerial/ advanced clerical workers (39%).

When area of origin is taken into consideration, the pre-migration concentration of females in the professional/managerial/advanced clerical category is maintained. A higher proportion of the Southern Irish women occupied this category than did their Northern Ireland counterparts (84% compared with 51%). Fifty-two percent (52%) of men from Northern Ireland were trade & related workers compared with 38% of Southern Irish men. The professional/managerial/ advanced clerical category accounted for 45% of Southern Irish men and 32% of males from Northern Ireland.

Table 5: Pre-migration Occupational Status by Gender

<i>Occupational category</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Professional/managerial/advanced clerical	55	39	71
Intermediate clerical	11	7	15
Trades & related workers	23	44	1
Intermediate production/elementary clerical/labourers	11	10	13
Total percentage	100	100	100
Total number of cases	202*	102*	100

Source: Interview questionnaire survey of post-1980 immigrants

Note 1: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

Note 2:* One respondent was not in paid employment

This study's post-migration occupational analysis was initially conceived of as including two distinct stages, namely occupational status immediately following initial arrival in Australia and current status. While interviewees were asked details of their occupational history in their first year in Australia, much of these data were not conducive to analysis. Some interviewees spent their first year in casual employment, to facilitate travel, or took a variety of jobs, often outside their pre-migration area of specialisation, simply to begin working. Others had difficulty having their qualifications or experience recognised in Australia and therefore, had to first operate at a lower level until comparable experience and/or training could be obtained. The post-migration occupational analysis which follows thus focuses on the occupational status of the interviewees at the time of interview.

The current (post-migration) occupational profiles shown in tables 6 and 7 indicate considerable movement between occupational categories, culminating in an increased

percentage of interviewees in the professional/managerial/advanced clerical category. This, in turn, suggests an overall trend of upward occupational mobility for both genders.

Table 6: Pre- and Post-Migration Occupational Status: Males

<i>Occupational category</i>	<i>Pre-migration status</i>	<i>Post-migration status</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Professional/managerial/advanced clerical	39	53
Intermediate clerical	7	-
Trades & related workers	44	37
Intermediate production/elementary clerical/labourers	10	11
Total percentage	100	100
Total number of cases	102*	102*

Source: Interview questionnaire survey of post-1980 immigrants

Note 1: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

Note 2: * One respondent was not in paid employment

When chi-square testing is applied to the male data to assess the relationship between the observed post-migration occupational distributions and the expected male occupational distributions (based on pre-migration status) (shown in table 6), a value of 13.313 is calculated. Given that the critical value of chi-square is 11.341 at 0.01 level of significance (df=3), the sample's chi-square value points to a relationship which is strongly significant in statistical terms and therefore, clearly indicates that high levels of upward occupational mobility have been achieved by the male component of the study's sample in Australia.

Table 7: Pre- and Post-Migration Occupational Status: Females

<i>Occupational category</i>	<i>Pre-migration status %</i>	<i>Post-migration status %</i>
Professional/managerial/advanced clerical	71	80
Intermediate clerical	15	11
Trades & related workers	1	4
Intermediate production/elementary clerical/labourers	13	6
Total percentage	100	101
Total number of cases	100	85*

Source: Interview questionnaire survey of post-1980 immigrants

Note 1: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

Note 2: * Table only includes those interviewees currently engaged in paid employment. Total number of cases has been reduced by 15 to accommodate the number of women not in paid employment.

However, because 15% of females were no longer in paid employment at the time of interview, it is not possible to assess the statistical significance of the female trends. A review of the pre-migration occupational profile of these women provides an interesting insight into the occupational background of interviewees who have chosen not to participate in the workforce in a paid capacity. The majority were former professional/managerial/advanced clerical workers (53%), 27% were former intermediate clerical workers and 20% were intermediate production/elementary clerical/labourers.

Given that 14 of these 15 women were parents with children, it is interesting to review the occupational status of those women of equivalent family status who were still in paid employment. Table 8 clearly indicates that the majority of these women held professional/managerial/advanced clerical positions.

Table 8: Occupational Status of Females (with Children) who were in Paid Employment sat the time of Interview

<i>Occupational category</i>	<i>Parent(s) with children</i>
	<i>%</i>
Professional/managerial/advanced clerical	77
Intermediate clerical	13
Trades & related workers	3
Intermediate production/elementary clerical/labourers	7
Total percentage	100
Total number of cases	69*

Source: Interview questionnaire survey of post-1980 immigrants

Note 1: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

Note 2: * Table only includes those interviewees currently engaged in paid employment who are parents with children.

In both the sample profile and the 1996 census data for Greater Melbourne's post-1981 arrivals, the majority of Irish immigrants are concentrated in professional/managerial/advanced clerical positions. However, the sample has proportionately fewer than the census for both intermediate clerical (5% as against 15%) and in intermediate production/elementary clerical/labourers (9% as against 18%). This imbalance points to one of the fundamental difficulties of achieving numeric representativeness when using snowball-sampling techniques.

This demographic overview of contemporary Irish migrants highlights some of the ways in which these migrants differ from their predecessors. Some of the main differences can be summarised as follows:

- ***The Irish in Australia: Heterogeneity in visa terms***

Today's Irish in Australia consists of more than permanent settlers with residency visas. A large proportion of the contemporary Irish hold temporary entry visas, entering Australia under working holiday and temporary business visas. Improvements in transport and communication have made travel between the two countries easier in the past twenty years than at any other time in history. These temporary entry visas have, in turn, not only facilitated this mobility of persons (and specifically workers) but have also enabled Australia to access and harness Ireland's available labour. The ethos of transnationalism which underlies the globalisation of production has, therefore, worked to both Australia's and Ireland's advantage.

One consequence of this development has been the phenomenon of category jumper. One-third of the sample arrived as temporary entrants and stayed. Category jumping of this kind was not an option for earlier generations because the cost and distance involved generally meant that travel to Australia was synonymous with permanency. The category jumper poses particular challenges to the recording of overseas arrivals and departure data.

- ***Return migration as a viable option?***

Some writers have argued that transport and communication improvements mean that for the contemporary Irish, return migration to Ireland is a practical possibility (Chetkovich, 2001:73, O'Farrell, 2000:339). Migration to Australia, no longer evokes the permanency it implied in earlier generations.

However, while the relative costs of return migration have reduced, some economic inhibitors remain. Interviewees spoke of life-cycle restrictions, not only to any planned return migration but also to the frequency of visits to their homeland. Parents with dependent children reported greatest difficulties in having the resources to do so. Economic conditions in Ireland, once the main impetus for emigration, now inhibit the prospect of return migration for some migrants. The Celtic Tiger phenomenon of the mid-1990s has brought about rapid economic growth with the ancillary result that Ireland is "now among the most expensive countries in the eurozone, having become rapidly more expensive since 1995. In 1999, Ireland was the 4th most expensive country in the eurozone after Finland, Germany and France and the 7th most expensive in the EU overall. Pricewaterhouse Coopers projections for February 2002 suggest that Ireland may now be marginally more expensive than Germany or France" (Cronin, 2002:1). The Celtic Tiger has heralded the end of return migration prospects for some interviewees as a result.

- ***Lost in the crowd: Official challenges to recording the “Irish”***

The term “Irish” poses particular definitional difficulties in the Australian context. Australia’s official demographic records can generally be used to identify persons born in the Irish Republic (the “Ireland-born”). However, persons born in Northern Ireland tend not to be given this separate recognition and are generally amalgamated under the “UK” label. In some cases, data for the Irish Republic are likewise collapsed under the “UK and Ireland” category. Attempts to examine the full extent of Irish migration to Australia are further frustrated by the number of immigrants arriving in Australia as family units having first lived outside Ireland and having had children born outside of Northern Ireland or the Irish Republic prior to arrival.

Identity issues within the island of Ireland means that even among Irish immigrants there is not a consensus as to what constitutes “Irish”. This is particularly true in relation to immigrants from Northern Ireland, some of whom self-identify as British not Irish. The existence of two distinct “Irelands” potentially undermines the data produced by question 11 of Australia’s 2001 census relating to country of birth. Unless respondents specifically stated Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland, this question will show an inflated “Ireland” value which will necessitate (a) expansion of the “Ireland unspecified” category or (b) amalgamation of data under the “UK and Ireland” label. Either option diminishes the usefulness of the data produced.

Conclusions:

So what conclusions can be drawn from this overview of contemporary Irish migration? From the available statistical data, a scenario of diminishing numbers emerges, not only in relation to earlier generations but also in terms of the proportion they now represent of Australia’s current immigrant flows. From the case study data, a picture emerges of a well-educated group characterised by further educational achievement and upward occupational mobility following migration. These characteristics make them ideal candidates for participating in the global economy and specifically, for meeting Australia’s labour demands.

However, the contemporary Irish depicted in the sample also present a number of complexities which challenge the ways that migration is currently conceptualised and recorded in the Australian context. One third of the sample was category jumpers. These interviewees did not enter Australia as immigrants in the motivational sense but as adventurers. Given the large number of Irish who continue to enter Australia under temporary visas, some of which permit long-stay temporary residency, the definition of migrant may have to be reconceptualized. Defining migration primarily in terms of settler arrivals may be too narrow and may consequently underestimate the true extent of migration flows because, as the contemporary Irish have shown, “original intent is not always definitive” (Keely, 2000:47)

The need for a re-definition of the term “migration” in the Australian context is further compounded, in the case of Irish migration studies, by the need for an accurate definition of the term “Irish”. The Irish are not a homogenous group in terms of origin but are comprised of the two distinct geo-political entities, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. While separate recognition is generally afforded to the latter, data for Northern Ireland tends to be subsumed under the broader UK category. A less frequent aggregation includes the Irish Republic with the UK. Such aggregation is analogous to the grouping of Australia and New Zealand under a single heading and presupposes a level of internal comparability which, in the case of the UK and Ireland grouping, is absent. The resultant category of “Irish” is often ambiguous and incomplete in both statistical and conceptual terms in Australia.

Conceptualisation and definitional issues are central to all intellectual pursuit. They provide the framework within which policies are formulated and decisions are made. Unless our concepts and definitions are as accurate and inclusive as possible, decisions will be inaccurate and incomplete. The challenges raised in this review of the contemporary Irish in Australia, point to the need for revision in how migration patterns are interpreted and definitions are constructed not only in relation to this enigmatic Irish group but also to the multiplicity of migrant groups which make up the fabric of contemporary Australian society.

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