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## Narratives of success among Irish and African Caribbean migrants

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### ABSTRACT


This paper compares the narratives of two men in midlife who migrated to the UK from Ireland and from the Caribbean as children, in the middle of the last century. We examine how success is narrated over the life course to show how migrants' positioning of themselves differs from the ways in which they are positioned by outsiders, including in policy and public discourse. We conclude that while outsider narratives often polarise success and failure, insider understandings of success are dynamic and culturally and historically situated.

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### Introduction

Public and political anxieties about levels of immigration are a recurrent theme within the UK, as are accompanying discourses about the economic and social threats which migrants pose (Gilroy 1982; Greater London Council 1988; Nickels et al. 2012; Jones et al. 2014; Runnymede 2014). Within contemporary debates the figure of the successful migrant is deployed by public figures performatively, in contrast to stories about failed or exploitative migration. For example, a keynote speech on successful immigration by the then-leader of the UK government opposition, Miliband (2012), framed migrants' success in terms of those like his father, the distinguished political thinker and veteran of the second world war Ralph Miliband, who 'have gone on to win Nobel prizes, run successful businesses and lecture in our universities', while the British Prime Minister, Cameron (2013), referred to migrants 'who are great scientists, doctors, medical practitioners, artists, musicians, sports stars'. These stories of conspicuous success are contrasted

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with what Miliband calls ‘the hidden stories of Britain’ about migrants who are exploited by low wages and substandard accommodation, but whose exploitation and lack of success also serves to damage the working conditions of the UK low paid.

In practice, however, ‘migrants’ encompass a rich variety of experience, including ‘permanent settlers; temporary “guest workers”; circular “birds of passage”; return migrants to their homelands’ (Fitzgerald 2012, 1726) and people are likely to occupy different combinations of these categories at various points in their life course. Likewise, success and failure are processes that migrants re-evaluate over time and at particular times in their lives. What constitutes success in migration is contingent on the intersection of the contexts of migrants’ lives pre- and post-migration, their individual reasons and preparations for migration and the socio-structural contexts they leave and arrive at (Mescoli 2014). From her study of women migrant domestic workers in Germany and the Netherlands, Lutz (2011, 185) challenges binary notions of success and failure, concluding that while:

some extol these domestic employees as ‘agents of change’ ... with remarkable propensities for mobility and risk-taking, others see them as ‘victims’ and stress the precariousness of their life-situations ... the empirical material turns up evidence in support of both positions ... they are interrelated and cannot be separated.

Recent scholarship also questions the frequently taken-for-granted assumption that ‘return migration’ signifies failure of the migration project and considers how experiences of transnational belonging shift over the life course (Zontini 2014).

Research on young adult migrants from Poland indicates that they resist being seen, by themselves and others, as failures. Their ideas of success are future orientated so that ‘failure becomes a dynamic notion relative to success, and yet is not its opposite’ (Nowicka 2014, 83). They compared their positioning to that of their peers in Poland. They, therefore, often placed themselves at the bottom of the social ladder in the UK, but as relatively successful in comparison with where they would be if they had stayed in Poland. The opposite can also be the case; as Brannen and Cernigo (2013) note, young people who do not migrate sometimes compare themselves favourably with those who do. Taken together, the implications of recent research are that binaries of success and failure are too simplistic and that, in neglecting migrants’ own perspectives, outsider perspectives downplay migrants’ decision-making, experiences and contextual considerations (Wang and Fan 2006).

This paper aims to contribute to the literature in three ways. First, it analyses insider narratives and considers how individual migrant narratives relate to canonical narratives of success and hardship. Second, it compares the narratives of an African Caribbean and an Irish migrant to explore commonalities and differences experienced by migrants to the same country, but from

different nations and ethnicities. Third, by taking a life course perspective, the paper considers how experiences of migration in early life reverberate across the life course and how ethnic and national identifications shift over time.

We first describe the studies we draw on and the rationale for our case selection. We then analyse the participants' narratives of their early lives, settling in Britain, building careers and experiencing racialization. Our discussion considers the significance of the contexts within which migration stories are produced and the dilemmas they involve.

## The studies

The study within which the analyses were conducted is part of the Parenting Identities and Practices project (PIP) within the ESRC funded NOVELLA Node (Narratives of Varied Everyday Lives and Linked Analyses) in which we are re-using data in order to advance secondary narrative analysis. The project brings together two studies concerned with migration, ethnicity, identity and parenting. The Serial Migration study is a psychosocial study of adults looking back on their 'non-normative' childhoods, the parenting they received from parents who were mostly migrants and its impact on their own parenting. Serial migration in this context involves parents migrating before their children do. The Fatherhood study is a sociological study of fatherhood across three family generations including two groups of migrants – Irish and Polish, together with UK origin white fathers. Our focus here is on the Irish grandfathers. The Serial Migration study aimed to collect stories about serial migration while informants in the Fatherhood study were asked initially to tell their life story and then about their experiences of migration and fatherhood.

PIP aimed to examine how family practices over the life course are narrated and to develop methodologies for qualitative secondary analyses and for bringing together data from different sources. The research team consisted of the Principal Investigators from the two data sets (Brannen and Phoenix) and a secondary analyst (Elliott). The secondary analyst had depth knowledge of the transcripts selected for the new project and the published papers, but did not have access to the audio recordings, field notes or unpublished project papers. The other two authors were primary analysts of their own study, but were secondary analysts of the other study. The implications of these different positionings and discussed elsewhere (Elliott et al. 2013) as are the authors' respective use of narrative approaches (Brannen 2013; Phoenix 2013; Phoenix and Brannen 2013).

### *Serial migration study*

This ESRC-funded project, *Transforming Experiences*, addressed the overarching question of how adults from different family backgrounds negotiate

their identities as they re-evaluate earlier experiences. It consists of empirical studies with adults who had various 'non normative' childhood experiences. The focus of this paper is on a sample of 53 participants who came from the Caribbean to rejoin their parents in the UK (serial migrants). Participants came from a variety of educational and employment backgrounds and were recruited through a combination of advertising, community organizations, electronic and physical notice boards and snowballing. They were asked to give accounts of their experiences and the study analysed narratives of their social and emotional contexts, experiences, change over time and the place of anticipated futures in these changes and in identity projects. The analyses included psychological and social processes, personal biography and positioning (Phoenix 2013). The interview transcripts included non-linguistic features to allow analysis of the interactional dynamics of the interview. Summaries were prepared as a first stage of analysis, followed by thematic analysis and narrative analysis focusing on temporality and the participants' 'small stories' (Bamberg 2006) for some interviews and some questions.

### ***The Fatherhood study***

The ESRC-funded study of Fatherhood across family generations set out to examine changes and continuities in fatherhood across three generations of men in 30 families: 10 chains each of Irish origin, Polish and white British. Grandfathers, fathers and sons aged (5–17) in each family were interviewed by the team of four researchers (one of whom was Polish and one part Irish origin) with a total of 89 completed interviews. Interviewees were recruited from multiple sources (Brannen 2015). For the adults, the interview method employed was a life story approach – the Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method (Wengraf 2001) which was followed by a semi-structured interview, together with photograph elicitation. Extensive field notes about the research context, the interview encounter and the particular themes covered were made which were further elaborated after the interviews had been transcribed. Drawing on these case summaries and interview transcripts, the individual cases and chains were compared on the basis of the men's biographical trajectories, their interpretations of their experiences, including in the interview setting, and the broad historical contexts in which their life course was situated.

### ***Case selection***

In the secondary analysis of these two studies we focused exclusively on men because the Fatherhood study included only men, while the Serial Migration study included men and women. From the latter we selected African Caribbean men who had migrated as children, while in the latter we included

the Irish men who migrated to the UK as young adults in the 1950s and 1960s. The Serial Migration sample comprised 14 Caribbean origin men; the Fatherhood study included ten Irish origin migrants.

For this paper, we first compare the two groups. We then focus on two cases selected from each study on the grounds of comparability in terms of age, the period when they migrated to the UK and of being fathers (two of the men in the Serial Migration sample were not). Both men chosen migrated to the UK in the 1960s, saw themselves as high achievers and enjoyed successful careers. Our two cases are Theo from the Serial Migration study and Harry from the Fatherhood study. Harry, uniquely in the Irish sample, was also a serial migrant. The majority of the Irish group were manual labourers, like most Irish male migrants of the time, and Harry was the only one to have achieved upward social mobility himself (most had children who had done so), securing a place in a profession through university education. An important part of his story was his children's achievements and how intergenerational social mobility was continuing through them. He also describes his personal life as successful. Theo was a successful entrepreneur. At the time of the interview he was working as a consultant, earning enough money to fund several months a year in the Caribbean, something he valued highly. The focus of his narrative of success was his employment career and family of origin rather than his children.

Both these men present counter-narratives (Bamberg 2006) to prevailing negative stereotypes of Irish and African Caribbean migrants of their generation (see, for example, Gilroy 1982; Greater London Council 1988; Hickman and Walter 1997). Thus Harry did not fit with the emblematic image of an Irish migrant as an unskilled, manual labourer (Nickels et al. 2012), while Theo did not fit into stereotypical patterns of educational failure and low social status among African Caribbean men in Britain. Further, serial migration is antithetical to contemporary canonical narratives of normative families as happily co-resident. Yet both men stressed the enduring strength of their ties to their families of origin and Theo in particular took care to underline that he did not fit the negative stereotype.

### **Contexts of migration: Ireland and the Caribbean**

For most of its modern history Ireland was a poor rural society with a strong, culturally ingrained pattern of out migration. From the 1860s to the 1960s Ireland was Britain's main source of reserve labour (Ryan 2004) and the Irish still formed the largest migrant group in the UK in the mid-twentieth century. The failure of post-independence Irish governments to develop the country accelerated this migration pattern (Garvin 2004). The Irishmen in the study were part of the 1950s/1960s wave of migration which saw the largest outflow of people from Ireland to the UK (Garvey 1985) and was

distinguished by a high celibacy rate (Hannan 2008). The majority left school at 14 years with no qualifications. The new migrants came from mainly rural backgrounds with many finding unskilled work in big cities, mainly in the construction industry (Brannen 2015).

Similarly, the African Caribbean migrants came mainly from rural backgrounds to British cities in response to invitations to fill labour shortages in the UK (Peach 1968) and deteriorating economic conditions in the 'West Indies' (Byron and Condon 2008). They were, and remain, a much smaller proportion of the UK population than the Irish. Initially the majority were young men. However, the gender imbalance shifted in the 1950s, when UK public services actively recruited in Caribbean countries for both men and women. In Britain, both Caribbean and Irish groups encountered hostility (Glass 1961; Patterson 1965). Unlike the Irish, the Caribbean migrants came from various islands and it was in Britain that they began to forge a new and common 'West Indian' identity (Byron and Condon 2008).

The fieldwork for both studies was conducted at the end of the 2000s. Demographic analyses from the turn of the century and the 2011 Census are, therefore, invaluable to the task of contextualizing the men's narratives. Evidence from the 2001 census indicates that there was considerable upward social mobility from first to second generation Irish men at a time when social mobility in Britain had flattened off. In contrast, longitudinal data on African Caribbean men tentatively suggest some downward social mobility for this cohort (Platt 2003). More recent data confirm these patterns. Comparisons of ethnic groups on the 2011 census found that Irish people were most likely to be in high-status employment in Britain, while African Caribbean people were amongst the most likely to be unemployed and to have part-time employment (Office for National Statistics 2014).

### **Migration experiences: the two studies**

Among the Irish migrants, there was an awareness of well-worn paths to England, 'the minute you were big you were gone' (Seamus). Migration was narrated as a necessary survival strategy, 'Ireland wouldn't keep you ... only for England I don't think there'd be any Ireland' (Eamon). Any losses associated with leaving Ireland tended to be eschewed: perhaps not surprisingly, since these migrants had come to the UK some 50 or so years prior to the interview.

Irish migrants maintained connections through remittances, letters and regular family holidays in Ireland. Many were involved in strong Irish communities in England, which had helped them to establish themselves when they first arrived and ameliorated aversive experiences. 'It was hell, but when you were working you know (pause) you soon get used to the places and (yeah) people and (pause) there was a big Irish community around' (Eamon).

However, in general, accounts of hardship in England were brief (in contrast to longer accounts of hardship in the country they had left), and offset by the positive aspects of what the men had achieved by living in England. 'But England's been very good to me, I must say that – Oh it means a lot to me to be Irish ... But I wouldn't live in Ireland now you know. But uh, I've made my home here years ago' (Seamus).

Despite the discrimination that the Irish migrants met in Britain, they tended to see themselves as relatively fortunate, valuing in particular their settled family lives which (given the high celibacy rates among Irish men of this generation noted above), could not be taken for granted). Some accounts of their identities and experiences consciously countered prevailing narratives of the difficulties endured by their Irish contemporaries in Britain.

I think most of them it's they're pub people – they meet in the pubs ... some of them got on terribly well but if you came over here and lived in a flat and never had any family or anything else, it's the saddest thing to meet them – it's very sad. (Mervyn)

Unlike the Irish men's narratives, many African Caribbean migration stories were the extreme and sudden change from the Caribbean to the UK. This was described in some instances as exciting but more often as shocking in terms of a shift in landscape and climate from the warmth and brightness of the Caribbean to the cold city with 'all the trees that didn't grow nothing' as Bobby put it. As well as the cold, children often had to acclimatise to feeling out of place in a predominately white, and often hostile, society.

Where participants had positive, or uneventful, experiences of serial migration, these were told in relation to the difficulties others had faced. 'In terms of serial migration, it hasn't had a negative impact on me or my sisters, but I've seen other people that it has had a negative impact on' (Peter).

All the African Caribbeans had migrated from the Caribbean as children, at a time when intercontinental travel was time-consuming and expensive and communications much less extensive than currently. Maintaining contact with the Caribbean was, therefore, both difficult and largely out of the children's control. It was thus more difficult for the Caribbean migrants to stay connected to family life in their countries of origin, particular with older relatives, some of whom were illiterate. Most of the Caribbean migrants first returned as adults, often many years later, to a place out of kilter with their childhood memories.

As adults, the Caribbean migrants described the Caribbean as a haven from racism, something they experienced as a disjunctive experience when they came to the UK. 'I wasn't exposed to discrimination in the Caribbean. I didn't experience discrimination until I came to this country' (Peter). Compared with the Irish, they were more explicit about the discrimination they faced in the UK, particularly institutional racism in schools which they



reported had lower standards than schools in the Caribbean, but expected them not to achieve educationally. For example, Kenneth explained how his black classmates were taken to the park and left to their own devices on most school days, rather than being taught in school. For the African Caribbean men, the British education system did not offer the same opportunities for social mobility as the children of the Irish migrants experienced through Catholic schools.

Unlike the Irish men, the African Caribbean men reported that racism was still an ongoing part of their lives and those of their children. Success stories were told in the context of awareness that being a Caribbean man in the UK is dangerous for many (Ministry of Justice 2012). 'Lenny' equated 'triumph' for a black man with 'being not dead, not in prison, not in a mental institution', while for others, success constituted surviving to craft a 'liveable life' (Butler 2004). As Anthony suggests when reporting a conversation with his supervisor, this was a struggle that was often invisible to others from less marginalized and precarious social positions.

(.) if you put yourself in my place and say you are 61 couldn't read until you- you know till a certain time (.) or- or would you think you'd survive to raise a family, buy houses and (.) and, you know, live a life? He said, no way he could he do it.

Professional achievement was narrated as unusual for the Caribbean sample, a position reinforced by external recognition of the rarity of such success. Three of the African Caribbean sample, including Theo, had been invited to give talks in a public arena about how they had succeeded, against the odds: 'as a person, a director at the pinnacle of my career, urr, for a black person coming in who lives in the inner city, how did I do it?' (Simon).

Among the Irish migrants, accounts of hardship and discrimination following migration were more muted. Although upward social mobility was equally rare among the Irish group as for the African Caribbeans, the Irish took pride in other measures of success, in particular the upward mobility of their children.

These then were the contexts within which our two cases were positioned.

### **Harry: a serial migrant from Ireland**

Harry was in his early sixties, the youngest among the Irish group and a member of the baby boomer generation. He was the only one in the study to migrate to England when still of compulsory school age in the UK. His parents (first his father and then his mother and siblings) migrated to Britain leaving six-year-old Harry with his grandmother on the farm she had run since her husband's death.

It was very lonely on the farm, just my granny, me, 100 acres and then cows, a couple of men to milk. And I milked cows and I drove cars at 12 – a Morris 8 – I drove my granny into the town and all that at the age of 12.

Harry's grandmother eventually had to sell the farm and she and Harry moved to England, when Harry was 14.

We sold the farm. ... we left the dog, left the car – it was extraordinary, just drove up the road in a taxi – left the car, left the dog. Poor Crab was running after us – it was a very traumatic moment, leaving the (pause) and sold the farm that was built by her husband.

The losses involved in migration are conveyed in the vivid image of the dog following their taxi (cf. Mulinari and Rätzzel 2007). The sense of the family history and standing which is left behind is suggested in the detail of 'the farm that was built by her husband'. There is a sense of suddenness too in the phrase 'just drove up the road in a taxi' which resonates with the migration stories of some African Caribbean men, who, as children, also had little control over the circumstances of their leave-taking.

Harry opened his narrative by underlining that his story was 'unusual', 'It's unusual to start with my granny, but I'll get to my father in a minute.' He starts with his granny because she brought him up while his parents were in England but also because she anchored his narrative of being part of an entrepreneurial, innovative, extended family on his mother's side. They were, he asserted, a 'brainy family', some members of which had at one time run a successful business in Ireland and built up a farm. From Harry's narrative, the resources his family had passed on to him were largely cultural. A central turning point for Harry is that his family suffered from the economic difficulties that beset Ireland in the 1950s. His father sought to establish a business in Ireland but lack of success forced him to seek the better economic climate of Britain.

But obviously times got tougher and tougher, and lots of them were going, and then he put um (pause) what I distinctly remember is when he went away to England was a sack – he put the stuff in a sack, threw it over his shoulder and got the bus to Dublin – a sack. Now (pause) but we weren't poor in the sense of (yeah) do you know what I mean? – He had a business. But just a sack, he put the stuff in it, you know. Not even a suitcase, he might have had a suitcase – my mother would shoot me if she heard me say that.

This account places Harry's father's migration story as both part of the economically motivated migratory flow from Ireland to England ('lots of them were going') and distinctive ('but we weren't poor'.) From his present perspective, Harry is keen not to present his family as victims of poverty and emphasizes their past social status. He underlines both that the family had a social position to live up to and the precariousness of that position. Similarly, it is clearly important for Harry to explain that his migration was not solely motivated by impoverishment: 'So we actually came out of Ireland with money in our pockets, which was unusual.'

## Settling in the UK

In common with the other Irish men, Harry found that his arrival in London was by being part of a large Irish community cushioned Harry's arrival and made him feel more comfortable (cf. Ryan 2007). Although the community protected him during his teenage years, Harry did not consider himself restricted to it or defined by it. After the isolation of rural Ireland he relished the excitement of multi-cultural city life and downplayed the racism of the time.

But London was exciting you know ... There was no ... I mean you had the anti-Irish and the dogs and all that sort of stuff ... we're quite a strong community and then you moved in Irish circles – even the school I went was a Catholic school.

Harry recalled being positive about the less than optimal secondary modern school he experienced when he arrived, dwelling on the free school meals and 'little library'. He benefitted from both free secondary schooling and a full university grant. He was the first to go to university in his family and so was economically dependent for longer than previous generations. He was particularly moved by his father's generosity in providing him with lodging and food throughout his education. Harry narrates his success as relational and historically situated in that he was both supported by his family and had opportunities his father did not. 'My father would have been a professor of engineering today.' Going to university and an early marriage to a Scandinavian woman provided Harry with an early escape from the Irish 'ghetto'.

### *Building a professional career, negotiating racism and a racialized identity*

Harry describes how as a young teenager he was insulated from anti-Irish sentiment, while referring in his interview to its existence more generally – ('anti-Irish and the dogs and all that sort of stuff'). The phrase 'No Irish, no blacks, no dogs' was common on signs advertising rented accommodation in England in the 1950s and was also used by several of the Irish men as shorthand to describe the discrimination Irish people faced in Britain. Ryan suggests that these signs 'have become a signifier ... for all the other unspoken and difficult experiences that are hard to put into words' (Ryan 2003, 75). It was, however, rarely elaborated as part of the personal experiences of the men in the Fatherhood study.

Harry saw himself differently from the stereotypical Irish migrant. His retrospective account was that, as a new migrant he was unwilling to acknowledge any anti-Irish feeling towards himself. This reluctance was common among the Irish men in this and other studies of Irish migrants. However, once Harry began applying for teaching jobs, he admits to encountering 'anti-Irish' racism and notes that he only began to think about this later.

And then the bombings were going off a bit ... and there was a bit of um (pause) uh 'Harry's a good chap but I don't think the parents would quite get on with him in a rural situation, you know but he'd be great in inner city.

The 'bombings' refer to the IRA's 1970s bombing campaign in Britain, which changed the climate for the Irish diaspora. This reference underlines that Harry was building a professional career at a time when many Irish men were regarded as a 'suspect community' (Hillyard 1993). Most of the Irish group who were slightly older than Harry found work in the construction industry through informal contacts with Irish networks, and remained in manual work in the building trade for their working lives. However, while Harry rose quickly in the teaching profession he too experienced discrimination and from the vantage point of his subsequent success explicitly mentions this.

'I know you're thinking of headships, but why don't you try the Catholic sector? You'd get more opportunities there'. 'I said 'but look, I've got a couple of Masters, I'm well qualified you know, academic. What's wrong with ... you know I'm not over sure I want to be on the religious sort of structure.' And uh (pause) but he's probably right. I mean Harry O'Connell applying to (pause) I applied to (pause) got interviewed once in (pause) where the hell was it? Sussex I think. And um, but I could sense that I was a little bit almost like a black man there you know.

Harry's comment that he was 'almost like a black man' is indicative of how migration stories are narrated through positioning in relation to other minoritized ethnic groups as well as one's own ethnic group (Mescoli 2014). His recognition of racism is produced in a narrative of how his racialized and ethnicized positioning intersects with his social class and occupational positioning to put obstacles in the way of his career. The comment also points to the ambiguous position that Irish migrants occupy in Britain, as insiders by dint of being white, yet outsiders culturally (Ryan 2007). In response Harry positioned himself as an 'internationalist'.

Towards the end of Harry's career and with the arrival of other waves of migrants, perceptions of the Irish in Britain shifted and with them discriminatory practices. For example, the 1994 Peace Process in Northern Ireland largely ended the IRA bombing campaigns in Britain and this coincided with the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger years in Ireland. This change was reflected for Harry in the fact that he was enticed out of retirement by the opportunity to teach in an elite school, '[how] *amazing (it is) to have a bloke like me in there, you think "God almighty" you know*'.

### **Theo: a serial migrant from the Caribbean**

Theo was in his mid-fifties and among the oldest of the African Caribbean sample. He was one of three men who suggested he came from relatively

well-off families in the Caribbean. Theo's parents migrated when he was seven and Theo followed a year later. Theo starts his story with a clear message that his parents' migration did not constitute a rift and unlike many of the African Caribbean men who described migration in terms of seismic change, he stressed the uneventfulness of his experiences of serial migration.

... my memories back in the Caribbean's always been with my parents ... I don't recall when they were leavin' and coming to England, tears or anything like this uh so I don't recall a parting (.) of them. However, I came to England uh (.) I believe it was within a year after they travelled, and then just went through the journey with them as a (.) as a family, as a unit ...

Unlike Harry, Theo does not mention the journey to Britain or leave-taking. He is also vague about the length of time he spent apart from his parents, underlining his point that the separation had little impact on him. Here, and throughout the narrative, Theo's family is presented as intact, a 'unit', even though they migrated at different times. Of his arrival in Britain he says he was 'neither disappointed nor happy – life carried on'.

Like Harry, Theo highlights a further difference between his story and those commonly told by the other migrants. He suggests that his family's move was not motivated by economic necessity because his family was comfortably off in the Caribbean, although he refers to tensions between his mother's and his father's families because the latter was wealthier than the former. Theo mentions that his father had worked in the airline business, while his mother's family were farmers. The tensions were not so great, however, that they prevented the family from returning to the Caribbean for holidays, a practice that makes Theo unusual among the Caribbean men in the study who rarely returned before adulthood. For Theo the key to achieving successful migration is continued contact with the Caribbean.

My parents never actually severed anything, (.) you know, they didn't sever the links with the Caribbean cos we went back often enough, they didn't sever the link with the children that there were gaps so I think that's probably one of the biggest differences. 'Cos the friends I speak to who have experienced that, there was a severin', they weren't goin' back to this village, they weren't goin' back to that, or they'd had some bad experience back there.

### ***Settling in the UK***

Most of the Caribbean men found Britain oppressive and hostile, an environment that their parents were largely unable to help them navigate. However, Theo's family created a space for themselves at the heart of their local community, reminiscent of their 'yard' in the Caribbean.

My friends, be it black or white, came to our house on the weekend to get the hot bread that **my** mum was baking or to have their hair cut by **my** father in our

backyard or to listen to music or to even get my cousins, the girl cousins, you know.

As well as enjoying a sociable home life, Theo was distinctive in suggesting that his school career was happy. After a strict Caribbean education, he found schooling in Britain relatively easy and was in the top sets, which were dominated by white children, although his school was 'mainly black' and therefore a 'comfortable' space. At school, as at home, he presented himself as being able to mix with the other children, getting on well with the white children in class, while playing with black boys outside, qualities which served him well.

### ***Building a professional career, negotiating racism and a racialized identity***

Theo left his comprehensive school at sixteen with 'O' level and CSE qualifications and went on to gain an 'A' level and an HND in construction at a further education college. He stressed the value of entrepreneurial rather than academic skills. He has had a varied professional life, buying and selling cars as a teenager and then becoming a site engineer and supervisor in construction. He then developed his own successful business and later decided to close the business, do a Master's degree and work as a teacher. At the time of the interview he had shifted career again and was a freelance consultant in marketing and computing. Theo's narrative makes clear that crafting a career entailed creative negotiation of racism. He highlights the value of being able to 'pass' for English on the telephone,

... because in my (.) in my career, you know, I've been, takin the advantage of usin' my name to make money, you know, it's a very English soundin' name, very sort of (?) 'hello, good afternoon, my name's' (mumbles) and blah, blah, blah' and it (.) and the last thing they expect is a black man.

On the other hand, Theo stresses that he has not assimilated or 'melted' into white cultures to get ahead. Rather he observed and 'duplicated' what was necessary to succeed in the UK without losing his identity as a 'black person' or indeed 'forgetting' racist injustices and crimes.

Theo had been asked to discuss his successful career in a media interview a decade before this research interview. He explained that his focus had been on 'the benefits of leaving' the Caribbean, which he considered to be economic opportunities. However, towards the end of the Serial Migration study interview a more ambivalent account of Theo's migration emerges. He reflects not on the benefits of 'leaving' but on the costs.

What would I say now? Would I suggest somebody leave the Caribbean and come to England? I would really suggest otherwise, you know ... to come and live in (.) in a lonely singular life to come and do that, you're gonna sacrifice all that kind of stuff for it, well then ...

The costs of migration Theo discussed related to the family that he created in Britain, a family life that has been marked by rifts with his children and estrangement from their mother, matters on which he did not wish to elaborate because this does not fit his identity narrative of a successful life.

## Discussion and conclusion

As we have suggested, both Harry and Theo recount success stories about their lives, particularly their professional careers. The emphasis on paid work is a central aspect of masculinity, especially for male migrants, and hence is an organizing theme of their life stories (Brannen 2015). Both highlight the importance of their extended families of origin and particularly the legacy of economic and social resources they provided.

The ways in which these two men re-present their lives run counter to the usual highly negative dominant narratives of migrants to the UK from Ireland and the Caribbean. Theo compares his experience favourably to those from families where separation from their parents was sustained and traumatic. For Harry, serial migration was less part of the landscape for Irish migrant families and his point of comparison with other migrants relates to his story of 'heartfelt' gratitude for the sacrifices made by his migrant father. His narrative is one of awareness that his occupational and economic success contrasts with those of many of his countrymen and was built upon his own agency and the legacy of coming from a 'brainy family' that could support him economically. In both cases these lives are recounted from the current viewpoint of having led a life that is generally judged successful in the Caribbean, Ireland and the UK.

Personal narratives are always historically located. Taking a life course perspective, we can see how lives and the stories that can be told about them are shaped by different historical periods and shifting cultural norms. Harry's upwardly mobile trajectory is made possible by access to free university education in the period and because he arrived while young enough to attend school in Britain, unlike many of the cohort of Irish migrants who entered the labour market and gained no educational qualifications. By the time the fieldwork for the Fatherhood study was conducted, the period of 'The Troubles' was over and, in Harry's words, 'the Irish was coming good', just as he had done. This points to a shift in discriminatory practices that provided for professional success and the conditions of possibility in which a success story about the Irish in Britain became both 'tellable' and heard.

Given the differing social mobility trajectories between Irish and African Caribbean populations, and accounts of the continuing racism the Caribbean participants and their children face, the narrative of intergenerational progress is not as prominent for the Caribbean men as it is for the Irish group. Theo, like Harry puts his professional success down to his own efforts and

stresses that the experience of serial migration has not impeded his career or connections with Caribbean relatives. However, he relates the difficulties he has with his family of orientation to serial migration. In contrast, Harry attributes his success and overcoming racism in his career as due to personal and familial factors. Thus a focus on the similarities and differences in the experiences of migrants to the same country who are from different countries and ethnicities enables us to draw out how success is historically and structurally situated as well as subjectively interpreted.

A life history 'is not a static product of an individual at a particular point in time, but a developing process reflecting a changing view of the life course' (Coleman 1991, 136). We can see this in Harry's narrative when he positions himself in a 'tradition of thinking about where you come from, who you are, what you stand for. You know living with the past, resurrecting it if necessary, and using it for the present'. It is also evident in Theo's narrative and in particular how he has revised his ideas about migration between the media interview he gave and this research interview. Even 'well-worn' stories, such as the migration one, are revised in the process of re-telling and for different audiences and contexts (Coleman 1991; Phoenix 2013). Theo's interview in the Serial Migration study was a space where the ambivalences associated with migration could be expressed. In addressing his own question 'what would I say now?' we can see Theo in the process of reworking his narrative about the benefits of migration, related to the interview context but also to the life stage he has reached and to events that have occurred between the two interviews.

In this paper, first we have shown the benefits of taking a comparative case approach while recognizing that the studies and cases are not directly comparable. Nonetheless the comparison does draw out the dynamic and nuanced nature of migrant experience by showing the commonalities and differences experienced by migrant men who came to the same country at a similar time, but from different countries and ethnicities.

Second, by taking a life course perspective, we have shown how two men can engage or disengage with particular stereotypical and racist 'stories' about their ethnic group at different moments in their life courses. Looking back from a present vantage point over long stretches of their lives suggests a very different experience from that which migrants are likely to have been through when they were young and new to Britain. It also gives a sense of how early difficulty can be transformed into later success.

Third, by situating migration stories in historical and cultural contexts we have shown how those of different ethnicities fare differently in the same society in a roughly similar period, with African Caribbeans encountering greater racism than Irish migrants, a racism to which their children (unlike those of the Irish sample) are subject.



To conclude, this paper has also illustrated the complexities of insider and outsider ethnic positioning (Amelia and Faist 2012) and how both men's identifications with ethnic categories and cultural narratives shift over the life course. Ethnicity and masculinity are in this case negotiated between the stories that people tell about themselves and the stories that are told about them. We have suggested that possibilities for, and so stories of, success are more tellable or more troubled at particular historical moments and points in the life course as well as to different audiences (e.g. a media interview compared with a research interview). Our focus on how migration stories unfold over a lifetime has enabled us to move beyond seeing migration as a fixed or individualized point that is either successful or not and to consider its dynamism, contingency and re-evaluation in migrants' experiences of life in the UK.

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