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Chapter 8

Children, Cousins and Clans: the role of extended family and kinship in the lives of children in returning Irish migrant families

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Introduction

This chapter considers the role of extended family and kinship in the experiences of children who move to Ireland as part of return migrant families. Evidence suggests that children who were born outside Ireland and moved there as children with Irish return migrant parents during the economic boom comprise a significant, though under-acknowledged, demographic group (Ní Laoire et al 2011). Positioned simultaneously as children in Irish families, *and* migrants to Ireland, they provide a unique perspective on family dynamics and structures of belonging in contemporary Irish society.

The chapter draws on research which sought to explore the experiences of children in return-migrant families from their own perspectives, conducted as part of the *Migrant Children* research project¹. The research is located within the paradigm of the new social studies of childhood, which recognises children's subjectivities and their roles as social actors. Within

¹ The research was conducted as part of the Migrant Children project in University College Cork which was funded through the EU Sixth Framework Programme by a Marie Curie Excellence Grant.

this paradigm, children are viewed as social beings who are actively involved in relationships with those around them and are competent social agents in the ways in which they participate in society (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998; James and Prout 1997). This challenges conventional models of childhood and of children's roles in families, which have tended to construct children as passive recipients of socialisation from parents. Instead, a more open and dialogic model of socialisation emerges, whereby children are viewed as competent social actors and active participants in parent-child relations (Wyness 2006). The concept of the family itself is also being re-conceptualised, with a marked shift away from the traditional normative ideas of nuclear biological units and towards an emphasis on more fluid ideas of family as a context for intimate relationships and family practices (Silva and Smart 1999; Jallinoja and Widmer 2011). Within this, it is recognised that family is something that people 'do' rather than something one is simply 'part of', thus emphasising the active involvement of both adults and children in the constant doing of family life, and in the shaping of different types of family relationships.

It is increasingly recognised that children are also active agents in migration processes, whether migrating as part of families or on their own (Orellana et al 2001; White et al 2011). Migrant children who move as part of families play varying roles in family migration decision-making and actively forge places in the world for themselves in contexts of mobility and rupture (Bushin 2009; Coe et al 2011; Ní Laoire et al 2011). Children's (and adults') experiences of migration are also shaped by the intersecting structures of family, social class, state, citizenship and migration regime within which they move and settle (Ní Laoire et al 2011). It is argued here that moving as part of the return migration regime, which involves an assumption of unproblematic belonging to the place to which you return, can confer upon children (and adults) advantages that are not easily available to children who move within

other migration regimes. Conducting research with children in Irish return migrant families highlighted for me the important role of factors such as assumptions of shared ethnicity, automatic entitlement to Irish citizenship as well as family and kinship connectedness in shaping return migration experiences, particularly when compared with the experiences of children who move to Ireland within other migration regimes. However, the research has also highlighted significant problems faced by many return-migrant children, who often found that they had to constantly assert their Irishness in the face of challenges to it from peers. Cultural markers such as accent were used by peers to construct them as ‘not-belonging’. Some of the children had been bullied; many had developed very complex strategies to ensure they would ‘fit in’ unproblematically. It could be argued that the presence of a child who is both a migrant *and* claims to be Irish challenges accepted native-newcomer dualisms, producing a certain emotional anxiety and resulting in attempts to construct the Irish/migrant child as clearly one or the other.

In this chapter, I explore the role of connectedness with family, kin and local networks in these children’s lives and in their complex negotiations of belonging. It is argued here that these factors can facilitate the accumulation of social and cultural capital among children of return migrants, which they can use to negotiate a sense of belonging and to support their claims to belong, but, importantly, that this does not always happen and that such capital is not available to all children of return migrants. The chapter points to the ways in which family connectedness facilitates belonging to local and national/ethnic collectivities for some, and conversely, can work to exclude those who do not have access to such connections. It points to the powerful role of family and kinship in Irish society, and to children’s roles as agents involved in social and familial networks and negotiating belongings and identities from complex positions in Irish society as simultaneously children, migrants and returnees.

Methodology

The research aimed to contribute to understandings of the experiences of children and young people who moved to Ireland with their return migrant parent(s) during the economic boom of the late 1990s and 2000s, and, in this, to prioritise the voices of the children themselves. It sought to explore the migration experiences, everyday lives and social worlds of these children and young people, and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in their relations with peers, family, kin and their negotiation of identities.

The research involved working with families who had moved to Ireland, where at least one parent was Irish, and there was at least one child who took part in that move to Ireland. Some of the families had one or two Irish-born parents and some had one or two second-generation Irish parents. Sixteen families, including 36 children and young people, and 21 parents, participated in the research. The ages of the young participants ranged from three to 18, and three young adults in their early 20s were also included. There were 15 boys and 21 girls. The most common countries from which participant families had moved were the USA and England, while families that moved from other parts of the world were also represented. All lived in the Cork and Kerry region in south-west Ireland, including urban, rural and suburban locations, and all had moved to Ireland during the period of high return migration between 1995 and 2007. Achieving a representative sample of the 'returning' child migrant population would have been very difficult given the lack of data and the dispersed and invisible nature of the population. However, efforts were made to include participant families with a range of geographical, family composition and social class profiles, reflecting as closely as possible the known characteristics of the population. The sample has a strong (but not entirely) middle-class profile, which partly reflects the estimated social class profile of recent return

migrants. It is difficult to disaggregate return migrants in Irish population statistics but studies have found that they have higher educational qualifications than the resident population (Barrett and Trace 1998) and that male graduate returnees earn on average 10 per cent more than similarly qualified residents (Barrett and O'Connell 2001).

In line with the general approach of the *Migrant Children* project, the methodological approach used in the research draws on the 'new social studies of childhood' in its emphasis on the use of children-centred participative techniques. It is based on the recognition of children as worthy research participants in their own rights (James and Prout 1990; James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Thus the research used methods that allowed the children to communicate in ways with which they felt comfortable and competent (Thomas and O'Kane 1998). This meant using a range of techniques in different combinations – including drawing, photography², mapping, 'play-and-talk' – depending on the participants' ages, abilities and interests. This is particularly important in research that aims to uncover children's perspectives in a context such as family migration where adult perspectives tend to dominate. It is through spending time with children and young people, and creating a space in which they can communicate their own views rather than performing particular expected roles that alternative perspectives on their lives emerge. This highlights the importance of using participative techniques with children that allow non-standardised or non-learned narratives to emerge. Children therefore are viewed in this research as competent narrators of their own lives, and following Smart's (2006) approach to narrative analysis, the focus was not on eliciting children's experiences of migration as if their accounts are simple factual recollections, but on understanding how they interpret and make sense of these experiences.

² The photography activity involved giving each participant a disposable camera with which to take photographs to document their lives, and using the photographs as a springboard for discussion, following the principles of the photo-elicitation method (Clark-Ibáñez 2004).

These research encounters occurred in the children's homes, and all family members were invited to participate. Usually, parents were not present during research with children, and neither were children present during research with parents. Repeat visits were made to each family (on average three to four visits with each family over a period of up to two years). The family and home-based focus facilitated the exploration of intergenerational dynamics and set the children's experiences and perspectives in their wider familial contexts.

Family, kinship and social capital

While a decline in the role of kinship has been commonly assumed as a feature of modern western society, more recently the significance of extended family ties as a feature of contemporary social life is being recognised (see Jallinoja and Widmer 2011). Many studies highlight for example the growing importance of multi-generational family ties and the important roles played by grandparents in childcare and in contemporary family life (Bengston 2001; Hank and Buber 2009). Transnational family studies also emphasise the strength of extended and multi-generational family connections in families that may be separated by migration (Chamberlain 2006; Reynolds 2006; Ryan 2004). In the Irish context, Corcoran, Gray and Peillon's (2010) study of social relations in suburban Celtic Tiger Ireland found that kin connections are very important for emotional and practical support as well as social interaction. The close interconnection of family, kinship and community in building social capital in particular is supported by a wide range of existing research, which points to the role of close familial ties as a source of emotional, practical and material support:

Arguably, it is through this institution [the family] and its associated practices that the individual can lay claim to the collective identity of the wider kinship and community

and to what is being perceived as social capital. There is, therefore, an affinity between the relatively private institution of family, its wider kinship network and the creation and utilisation of social capital (Goulbourne and Solomos 2003: 332).

Bourdieu's concept of social capital as it relates to family is particularly useful, understood as:

the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (1997: 47/51; cited in Edwards, Franklin and Holland 2003: 6).

As Edwards (2004) outlines, this concept of social capital recognises that it is constituted in part through families and communities, in a way that is continuously worked at, and that it is central to the reproduction of privilege and inequality:

continually transmitted and accumulated in ways that produce and reinforce social inequality (Edwards 2004: 6).

Of particular interest in this research is the relationship between family and social capital from the perspectives of children. As Morrow (1999) argues, much social capital theory tends to view children as passive objects of socialisation rather than as active agents in the production and transmission of social capital. She argues that children actively develop their own social connections and even develop contacts for their parents. In terms of understanding how children accumulate and use social capital, the allied concepts of 'cultural' and 'symbolic' capital in the Bourdieuan sense are useful. This refers to the 'range

of scarce goods and resources lying at the heart of social relations' which confer status and prestige on the owner (Connolly 1998: 20). Connolly (1998) has used Bourdieu's concepts of social, cultural and symbolic capital (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) in his research on racism and gender identities among young children in a multi-ethnic primary school in London. He argues that the accumulation of particular types of social and cultural capital, such as ability to play football, or being streetwise, creates advantages that reinforce some children's status among their peers. In our own research with migrant children in Ireland, we have highlighted the importance of recognition and acceptance within peer networks and local communities to children's feelings of attachment and belonging, and we have identified the importance of particular types of cultural and symbolic capital to that (Ní Laoire et al 2011).

This chapter focuses in particular on the role of extended family, kin and connectedness in facilitating or inhibiting social integration and belonging through the everyday realities of life in Ireland among children of return migrant families. It explores the role of family connections as a source of social capital which can be used by migrant children to gain access to other sources of social capital and also to accumulate cultural and symbolic capital that is of use to them in their everyday lives and negotiations of identity and belonging. The focus is on the ways in which families mediate, foster or inhibit the formation of social networks, sociability, social ties and collective attachments and belongings in children's everyday lives, which go beyond the family itself. I also explore how children actively engage with these processes, and the ways in which these processes shed light on the role of family and kinship in wider processes of inclusion and exclusion in contemporary Irish society and Irish diaspora.

Cousins, extended family and social capital

All of the children who participated in the research had relatives who were living in Ireland. Some had close kin (grandparents, aunts, uncles and first cousins) there, while others had more distant relatives (second cousins). Some moved to live near their families and others moved to other parts of Ireland. Family was a very important part of everyday life and source of social capital for many of the participant families in this research. This was apparent on my research visits to their homes when relatives frequently dropped by or children would mention that they go to their grandparents' homes after school, for example. While the network of reciprocal arrangements between family members was extremely important in shaping the space of family life for many of the children in this research, I focus here on the role of cousins in particular, though not exclusively, as this was a common theme in the children's narratives.

The role of cousins emerged from the research with children as being very important. Having cousins nearby or elsewhere in Ireland helped to foster a sense of belonging and helped children to develop their own social networks. Children's relationships with cousins are particularly interesting as they are child-centred and show how children themselves actively form kin-based connections, while recognising that they do so within wider familial structures. Many children mentioned cousins as one of the best things about moving to Ireland:

C: ...How did you feel when you found out you were going to be moving?

David: Nervous or shocked.

C: And what did you think it would be like?

David: I didn't really know, I thought it was good, I thought it was a lot closer to family and cousins.

C: So you had come back on holidays?

David: Yeah.

C: And what was it like coming back on holidays then, did you used to look forward to it or..?

David: Yeah a lot.

C: Really?

David: Yeah, mainly cousins.

(Conversation with David, aged 12)

Whether they lived near or far from them, most of the children and young people who participated in the photography project took photographs of their cousins. Usually, these were taken at special family occasions or during family visits. Cousins (along with grandparents, aunts and uncles) seemed to form an important backdrop to the children's lives in Ireland, marking special occasions and representing 'ready-made' social connections, recurring frequently in their photographs and in our discussions. These 'ready-made' social connections proved very important to some of the children at a time when migration had disrupted many of their pre-existing social networks. Children's relationships within extended family networks also form an important part of how these family networks work – their roles as cousins and grandchildren often providing a focus in the extended family, as the family relationships become shaped around practices relating to childcare as well as activities such as children's birthdays, cousins' sleepovers and visits to grandparents. Similarly,

Corcoran, Gray and Peillon (2010) found that kin relations and ties, frequently expressed through regular social rituals, are still highly significant in suburban Ireland.

Cousin and kin relationships were clearly important to the children as meaningful relationships in themselves. However, they also played additional roles. Cousins played a particular role in facilitating integration in wider communities. Some of the children moved to live in localities where cousins lived nearby, for example the Kennedy³ family who moved to a rural location close to many of their relatives and cousins. This meant that they attended the same school as their cousins, which in this case, was a source of social support for Sean and facilitated his integration within the peer group:

C: How about you Sean, would you say it's hard to make friends or easy?

Sean: No because I had a cousin and I knew him before and I just hung out with him and I made friends (Conversation with Sean, aged 12).

In cases such as this, potential markers of difference (such as accent) for a migrant child can be rendered unimportant by a family connection which supports the child's claim to belong.

Extended family connections often play the role of gatekeeper to new social networks, and this was also the case for spouses of return migrants. For example, Kathy who was born in England and had moved to Ireland with her Irish-born husband and their two children, told me that it was through the intervention of her mother-in-law that she had made her first local friends:

³ Pseudonyms are used throughout.

I've been quite fortunate about [my husband's] mum's best friend. Her daughter and [my husband] grew up like cousins. She asked my mother-in-law if I wanted to meet anyone in [this town] because her best friend lives [here] she would.....you know ...to give her a ring and we'd meet for coffee. [...] I've been quite fortunate there that I've met them and I actually get on well with them and I like them and enjoy going out with them so that was quite nice. I didn't think that would happen (Kathy, parent).

The role of extended family as a connector to wider social networks and communities is very important, reinforcing Corcoran, Gray and Peillon's (2010) finding that having access to local family circles was associated with an increased number of local ties for families in suburban areas. This suggests perhaps that extended families may act as *connectors* to wider non-family networks. Family/kinship, social capital and locality are clearly inter-related, although this is geographically contingent, raising interesting questions about the ways in which social structures and power relations operate at the local level in Irish society.

In addition to this gatekeeping role of cousins for return migrant children, extended family connections can also convey 'legitimacy' in the sense of a 'legitimate' claim to belong. Caoimhe (aged 15, moved from England), talked about having difficulties in being accepted locally, linked to being seen as 'English'. She spoke very proudly of her local familial connections as some of her second cousins lived locally.

...like, you know, if you're in trouble in school and some people are, like, saying things to you, you'll always have, like, at least then I don't feel like "Oh I've no-one here to stick up for me" because I do, like, because my cousin, he's in the same class as me [...] I remember one day one of the lads said something about me and they

were only messing and my cousin said “Oi, she’s my cousin” and - “Sorry I didn’t know she was your cousin” (Caoimhe, aged 15, moved from England).

In this sense, cousins can provide very real protection from being marked out as being different and not belonging within peer networks.

Related to this sense of ‘legitimate belonging’, for some children and young people, the very fact of having cousins and other extended family members who lived in Ireland was in itself something that reinforced a sense of belonging and Irishness. A number of the participants constructed self-narratives that emphasised their identities as members of strong transnational extended family networks. For example, Cait’s photobook about her life, which had 28 pages, included 13 pages devoted to members of her extended family and only two dedicated to her immediate family. Most of the photographs were taken in Ireland of relatives who were either living in Ireland, or were on holiday in Ireland from England at the time. A page devoted to her grandfather includes the words: ‘My Mum’s Dad - Irish and crazy – I love him to bits’ (Cait, aged 15). The use of the descriptor ‘Irish’ is quite revealing, as he was born in Ireland, unlike Cait herself, suggesting that Cait wishes to emphasise her grandfather’s ‘Irish’ credentials in birthplace terms, thus also asserting her own Irishness through her connection to him. In a number of ways, participants connected ethnicity/nationality with kinship in this way, and used the fact of their kin connections to assert their claims to belong.

Extended family connections also provided access to particular types of cultural and symbolic capital. For example, parents and extended family members encouraged children’s interests in cultural activities which could be a source of cultural capital in Irish society. Sean (aged 12) drew a self-portrait during one of the research visits, which shows him playing football

and wearing the strip of his favourite (English premiership) club, Arsenal. He recognises that supporting this particular club is in itself a source of symbolic capital among his peers locally. However, it seems to be also an important dimension of his relationship with his father, who has taken him on trips to England to support the team, and furthermore, it is closely connected with his transnational extended family. His relatives in Ireland and England first introduced him to soccer while he was living in the US, when his aunt sent him an Arsenal jersey, and his trips to England are also an opportunity to visit relatives there.

C: So have you always followed Arsenal?

Sean: Eh yeah, when I was in America I think I saw them on TV and I liked them and then my aunt brought me and my dad over an Arsenal jersey so I supported them ever since.

C: Really? Yeah? So would many people follow it in America?

Sean: Em, I'm not so sure, I don't think that they follow that much soccer, 'cos like when I was over there I didn't really know soccer.

[...]

C: Yeah and do you play it in school or in a team or anything?

Sean: Yeah, when we have break we always play soccer.

(Conversation with Sean, aged 12, moved from the US)

Playing soccer and supporting Arsenal is a very important part of his identity and clearly is a source of symbolic capital for him among his local peer networks, as well as a focus of interaction with his transnational extended family. In many subtle ways like this, extended family members, or local rooted family connections, can socialise children to the expected

norms of Irish or local society, providing them with the cultural knowledge that they need to navigate local systems of meaning.

Holidays, memories and expectations

The children's family connections to Ireland also meant that many of the families had spent holidays in Ireland before moving there. Many of the children spoke about very happy memories of holidays in Ireland before moving there full-time. In one way, this lessened the culture shock of migration. For example, the Murphy family had gone to Ireland on holiday regularly and had even bought a house there before moving back. Emily and Esme's holidays had involved spending time in their house in Ireland, seeing relatives and making friends in the neighbourhood. The latter proved to be very important in easing the transition to living there full-time.

C: So what was it like when ye moved here? It was last year wasn't it?

Emily: Mmm, it was in summer, August

C: How did you find it?

Esme: It was okay because we knew [friend x] and [friend y] and stuff - they're friends from around here.

Emily: And we like knew them already

C: Oh I see. How did you do that?

Emily: Because we had made friends. One day two girls were out and they were friends with the others so then we became friends with the others and then one day [friend x] came up to us because [she] was new but we had this house as a holiday house but [she] didn't know anyone so she said 'hi can I be your friend?' and we said sure, so then we got to be great friends.

(Conversation with Esme and Emily, aged 8-10)

However, of course, living full-time somewhere is a very different experience to spending one's holiday there, as some of the participants discovered. For some, starting school marked the transition point between old and new experiences of a place.

Our neighbours in our first house were English and I played with the girl next door all summer. The biggest shock was when school kicked in – it wasn't a holiday any more. It was real. School - everything was so different. I started Brownies over here – it was so different. I had a birthday party in November. I thought everyone was okay. I don't know when things went downhill.

(Conversation with Cait, aged 15).

Until then, being in Ireland had been familiar and comfortable, their social worlds marked by a combination of spending time with extended family and being 'tourists'.

... because [this town] was always more fun than Boston. *[Laughter]* [The town] had sweet shops and I could go to the shop by myself and I had friends on the road and everything.

(Conversation with Caroline, aged 23, moved from US at age 11)

We came home every summer and they had an idealised view of Ireland – holidays, grandparents, Lucozade and chocolate, football.

(Conversation with Pauline, parent)

Spending holidays in Ireland can contribute to unfulfilled expectations about living there full-time. For example, Colin (aged 18) had expected life in Ireland to be a rollercoaster of fun times with cousins, but was disappointed when he found that his parents had decided to live in a location which was midway between both sets of relatives, but not close enough to either to see them every day.

... all the family would kind of come around or whatever like you know, they would come around during Saturdays or Sundays or if they are not working, so like for that two or three weeks, you would have all your cousins around you nearly full time whatever, but I'd say I wasn't expecting that like, I was thinking that was how life actually was back here.

(Conversation with Colin, aged 18, moved from the US)

Similarly, Bart (aged 7) pointed out to me that his cousins lived too far away to see them regularly, even though some of them lived just a few miles away and he was attending a party with them later that day:

C: Okay. So now that you're back in Ireland is it nice to be able to see them [your cousins]?

Bart: Yeah, like, some of them – every single one of them lives far away because one lives in [town 20 miles away], the other lives in [nearby suburb], that's the one who I'm going to the party with like, and then, oh yeah, there's also another cousin and I don't know where they live in Ireland (Conversation with Bart, 7).

Arguably, he actually lives quite close to his cousins compared to where they had lived previously, but to him, they are still far away. This suggests firstly that his expectations are shaped by having spent holidays in Ireland when he would see his cousins a lot, and secondly, that the idea of moving back to be near to family is very different when viewed from children's and adult perspectives.

It could be argued that children's return migration experiences in many ways can reflect the contradictions of adult return migrant relationships to family. Migrant narratives often express a tension between a desire to return to community and family structures on the one hand and a desire for autonomy and independence on the other. Research in diasporic contexts on transnational family networks points to the frequently oppressive, restrictive and conflictual nature of family relations in the diaspora – in the Irish context (Gray 2004, Ryan 2008) and elsewhere. These tensions continue to play out after return. As pointed out by Portes (1998), the downside of strong families and communities is that they can be exclusionary, can restrict individual freedoms and can place excessive claims on members. Some of the parents in the research acknowledged this.

... you know, no mother – every mother still thinks you're her child ...no matter if you're independent, whatever... they still use the tricks they used to use to get you to do things for them to manipulate you and she just wouldn't stop ...[...] but that's something I did not foresee that once you get back into – I didn't foresee it even though I was warned that once you're back into the family, the politics ...the tricks, like your family take liberties with you, they would never do with anyone else...
(Pauline, parent).

Some migrants deliberately chose not to return to live too close to family, such as Colin's family above. Karen (another parent) also stated that they made a conscious decision to move back to a location in Ireland at some distance from her close relatives:

.... I suppose I come from a large family; my parents are both still alive so there could be a tendency where, you know... Irish I think, in some cases, families can still be very over involved, too involved. So I'd had a lot of time of being away from that. And we had established our own life and we had our own way and we didn't have any interference from [my husband's] family either. So, we're very sort of clear around that (Karen, parent).

However, she admits that the children still express a desire to be closer to cousins, and the family narrative of return cites 'proximity to cousins' as part of the rationale for the return move.

... the positive was that they were coming to their cousins, and Nanny and Granddad and extended family. So that was a positive side for them [the children]. (Karen, parent).

... you know, the kids would almost like to be closer to their cousins. In fact, they're talking now about "Oh, we're on holidays, aren't we going to see...?" You know?! Which cousin, you know - "Aren't we going to see [cousin x], aren't we going to see [cousin y]?" So... (Karen, parent).

The realities of return and living full-time in Ireland for children can often be disappointing and challenging compared to holiday memories. While holiday memories can ease the transition, they can also contribute to unfulfilled expectations.

Family tensions and absences

Extended family relations in the context of return migration are not necessarily straightforward then, contributing sometimes to unfulfilled expectations and disappointments. Having rooted family connections does not necessarily translate into social and cultural advantages for all return migrant children, given the complex nature of family relationships, particularly in the context of migration and return. The tensions and resentments associated with migration and its legacies within families can have far-reaching effects on family relations, which are brought sharply into focus by return migration (Gray 2004, O'Donnell 2000). In other European diasporic contexts, research highlights the complex matrix of relations of obligation, guilt, desire and conformity/resistance, which characterise transnational families (Christou 2006).

Relationships with cousins are not always unproblematic. For example, Cait talks about tensions with her cousin in Ireland, which she explains with reference to the effect of her migration to Ireland on their relationship.

Cait: My cousin [name] and I were really very close, we were inseparable, until she moved away. Her family moved to Ireland [first] [...]. After that we drifted apart a bit.

C: Why?

Cait: Well, we just drifted apart and it was kind of strange because when we moved to Ireland [...], until then Ireland was kind of her thing, so she didn't really like it. Plus whenever anyone like my aunt came over from England, instead of just staying with them, they'd have to come and see us too.

(Conversation with Cait, aged 15, moved from England)

This highlights the ways in which transnational migration can disrupt family relationships, or in the case of return migration, can shatter high expectations of such relationships. In another family, siblings Elaine and Daniel moved to a small rural locality where they live close to their cousins. Despite going to the same small school as their cousins, Elaine has had problems making good friends in school. Discussions with the parents reveal that the cousins have not bonded. As a result, friendships have not developed and having cousins does not seem to have facilitated a wider integration within local peer networks. This may be related to tensions that also seem to exist between the adults in the extended family. The parents feel that their relatives cannot make room for them in their lives despite having encouraged them to return. Research by Gray (2004) and by O'Donnell (2000) has highlighted the ways in which the emotional 'baggage' of emigration/staying/return decisions within families can be a source of conflict when return occurs. Feelings of guilt, envy and resentment, on both sides, can come to the surface when return migration disrupts the status quo. Whatever the cause of the tensions in this family, the result is that family connections have not helped the children to become integrated in the local peer networks. In fact, they may have hindered it as the family tensions can have effects within the wider social networks. The parents now regret not moving back to a large city in Ireland where they would be able to start anew and develop their own social networks, and where their children could attend larger and more diverse schools. The downside of close familial and local ties is that if those ties are not supportive,

they can actually act as barriers rather than ‘gatekeepers’ to the accumulation of social capital.

What happens then among return migrant families when family connections are weak or absent? Many of the children who participated in the research had more and closer family ties in their previous country of residence than they had in Ireland. These were either ties to their Irish diasporic family members or to the families of their non-Irish parent. Many of the children expressed a strong sense of loss at leaving them behind. When asked about how she felt when she discovered they would be moving to Ireland, Jade said:

It was just like I was scared, ‘cos I’d lose my friends and all that and it was going to be a long time until I make friends, and I’ll leave my grandparents [...] also because my cousins em, we used to see each other like every day at school, so... (Jade, aged 9)

Caoimhe (15) talked a lot about her relatives in England:

... Just to get some [photos] of my family in England would be nice, that’d be the only one thing that I was – about not taking but ...

C: Yeah, yeah. And that would be your Nana and you have cousins as well?

Caoimhe: Cousins and uncles and aunts.

C: Really?

Caoimhe: Yeah, so it’s kind of hard being away from them but it’s nice to have pictures.

C: And would you say that you’re quite close to them?

Caoimhe: Yeah definitely, I mean, like – my cousins, now there's only a few of us, like, so we'd all be very close, like brother and sister (Caoimhe, aged 15).

Many parents also talked about the very strong social and support networks, both family and non-family, they had in the previous country of residence:

... and I think you will never have friends like you have when you're away from home. [C: Really?] They take the place of your family, they really do. And I think here you get caught up in family and sometimes the friends kind of take a little bit of a back burner but you would never have friends like you have in the States or wherever you are away from home. They just – they really do take the place of your family and you would tell them things and, you know, you rely on them a lot but no we had great – we really did have great years there (Sean's parents).

Some miss these close connections more than others, as they do not have extended family living nearby in Ireland. The importance of having family connections in Ireland had become apparent to them. For example, Karen, who had consciously moved to an area distant from her relatives, found that, ironically, the absence of family networks made life difficult:

So, you know, the change I suppose, particularly for us now is that we're in Cork, where sort of I don't have that network of people and we don't have my extended family around here, so it's almost like starting off from scratch back here, you know (Karen, parent).

And in fact, there was somebody who was just saying that they came from the UK into Ireland...today I was just talking to them about it...and they said "You know, Cork people are very sort of, you know, clannish....

C: Yeah. Absolutely.

Karen: And they sort of, you know...it's great, sort of, but it can take time for you to actually get into the networks. (Karen, parent)

These examples, together with that of Elaine and David's family above, suggest that while extended family can be a powerful source of social capital for return migrant children and their families, those who do not have the benefit of strong and supportive familial connections can be at a disadvantage. Anne (aged 23) reflects on what it means to her to have left behind a strong Irish family network in England to move to Ireland as a young child where she had no cousins:

my friends and.... like they are really close to their aunts and things and like they are friends with their cousins that are the same age and things and then I am kind of wondering, you know, if I was in England, but it would be different like, I'd have a ...kind of... like family network around me whereas here I just have my parents and my brother like. (Anne)

... I suppose I kind of miss the fact that I don't have any aunts or uncles or cousins in this country and like just looking at my friends and seeing how close they are to their, you know their aunts and uncles and ahem cousins like... (Anne)

In other words, it is not just the absence of extended family in Ireland that is a source of loss in itself, but importantly, the comparison with friends who do have those connections in Ireland, and the realisation that such connections are very important to social life in Ireland. Karen uses the term ‘clannish’ to describe ‘Cork’ society above, denoting a traditional social structure based on closed kinship ties. Other parents used the term ‘cliques’. These are very particular perspectives of course, but revealing nonetheless.

In situations where extended family is absent, the role played by children in initiating and developing *new* social networks in Ireland becomes very important. Some of the parents talked about the role of their children as connectors to local networks. Many parents, and in particular mothers, found that there were just two key ways of developing social networks in Ireland as return migrants – either with extended family members or through their children. When asked if she would have any advice for others moving back to Ireland, Pauline said:

I’d say do your homework and get your kids involved, I’d say join the parents’ association, I mean that was key to me making new friends and fitting in (Pauline, parent).

Similarly, according to Helen:

[... my son’s friend in school] and then, her mother and I have become very good friends in the meantime, [...], you know, we have become, live just two streets away so, no I think just knowing, having one group of friends like that in the beginning, that’s other mums in the school, I’ve made friends in the school as well (Helen, parent).

Children played a crucial role as agents in overcoming the absence of family networks and in developing new social ties, suggesting that children can contribute to the development of new social networks outside of traditional familial structures. As argued by Morrow (1999), children can play a crucial role in the accumulation of social capital by parents, thus challenging assumptions that children are passive participants in parent-child and other familial relationships.

Conclusion

Extended family plays an important role in return-migrant children's lives. The structures of family and kinship shape the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion experienced by children in return migrant families by providing social support, a sense of belonging, cultural capital and access to other networks for those who have access to supportive familial connections. In contexts where relationships with peers and with others may be problematic and can undermine return-migrant children's sense of belonging, their active relationships with cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles can provide an alternative source of valuable social capital and can be used by the children to embed themselves in wider social networks. Importantly, these same structures can also be viewed as exclusionary, denying access to social and cultural capital to those who do not have strong and supportive family connections, sometimes acting as barriers rather than facilitators. Absences or tensions in family relationships become particularly marked in contexts of return migration, and in many ways, children's return migration experiences can reflect the contradictions of adult migrant relationships to family.

The research points to the powerful role of family and kinship more broadly in Irish society and in Irish diaspora. The power of family and kinship in Irish society has clear implications for children in new Irish families who may not have such connections, or whose connections may not be well embedded in Irish society or locally. Family and kinship are inextricably bound up with power relations in Irish society, through their role as a key institution in the formation and accumulation of social capital, intersecting with social class, locality and migrancy in the reproduction of social structures in Irish society. Children play a central role in these processes as agents involved in shaping and re-shaping social and familial networks, actively involved in the everyday doing and re-doing of family and kinship. As they negotiate belongings and identities from complex positions in Irish society as simultaneously children, migrants and returnees, return-migrant children's unique perspectives highlight the complex relationships between family, power, locality and belonging in contemporary Irish society.

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