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CHANGING AND CLAIMING ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN THE 1991 AND 2001 CENSUSES

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the history of the making of a new category in the 1991 Census about ethnic origin. And it considers the developments that led to the revision of this question in the 2001 census. The paper then proceeds to present and discuss, first, evidence from the ONS Longitudinal Study about the domestic and economic circumstances that were associated with a change in selection of ethnic identity in the 2001 census compared with the 1991 census. Second, the paper focuses on a new category in the 2001 ethnic question 'White Irish' and examines who did and who did not claim this identity in 2001, and what domestic and economic factors explain the results.

KEY WORDS

Irish, minority ethnic, second generation, census categories

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INTRODUCTION

In 1991 the decennial census included a question on 'ethnic group' and in 2001 in asking 'What is your ethnic group?' the census offered a number of additional categories including 'Irish'.¹ The introduction of the ethnic question in 1991 had been an innovation surrounded by controversy. This paper outlines why a question on 'ethnicity' was included in the 1991 census and why an Irish category was introduced in 2001. Problems arising in formulating the census questions will be dealt with elsewhere.

The need for a census question

The case for an ethnic question had been made by the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) in 1979

Reliable statistics about the main ethnic groups in the country are necessary for measuring community needs, for developing housing, health, education and employment opportunities, and for monitoring the way our race relations laws are working. (OPCS and GRO, 1979, in Leech 1989)

and was made clearly and forcefully by the CRE in 1980

Strategic planning by local and central government departments to reflect the changing demographic, geographic, social and economic circumstances of the population over the last decade or so will be seriously impaired unless the 1981 Census contained ... an ethnic question which would enable policy makers and others to identify the extent to which important sectors of British society, such as ethnic

¹ The two census questions are reproduced in Appendix A

minorities, are integrated into the fabric of our social and political life.
(Commission for Racial Equality, 1980)

In 1983 the Home Affairs Committee identified the monitoring of equality policies as an important reason for including an ethnic question in the census. The chairman also observed

It is the very absence of this information which may well be a reason why successive British governments have failed to take the action which I think all of us would like to see them take. (HC 33-I, 1982: 145-6)

A prolonged debate about an ethnic question followed and it was only in 1991 that such a question was included in the census.

The stability of ethnic identity

One of Moore's original criticisms of the proposal for an ethnic question was that ethnicity was a contingent aspect of a person's identity. Rex and Moore (1967) encountered lads from County Clare in Sparkbrook who could present themselves as wild Irish rebels one day and Brummie Teddy boys the next. Blackwell, in her discussion of 'fragmented life courses' returned to the contingent nature of ethnicity:

Since they are historical products, bonds of ethnicity may shift in meaning, may be strengthened, weakened or dissolved, and they will have varied salience at different points in an individual's or a group's biography (2000: 6)

'Ethnic group classifications imply a stable characteristic that is carried through an individual's lifetime' (Simpson and Akinwale, 2004: 3) but, as was argued in 1983, this is not the case. There is evidence from outside the UK that

racial category may change in three ways fundamental to demography: between cohorts, at different ages, and at different time periods. For example, far more new people identified themselves as American Indian in the USA 1990 Census than could be consistent with the 1980 Census records (Passell 1993; Nagel 1995); similarly the increase of 46% in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders between the Australian Censuses of 1981 and 1986 reflected 'an increase in the propensity to identify themselves as such in the Census' (Evans et al, 1993). In Trinidad, the count of young adult Africans grew rapidly after the political successes of the Black Power movement in the 1960s. These changes can be seen as reflecting *cohort* experiences of socio-political movements. Age also has an impact on stability of ethnic group.... (Simpson and Akinwale, 2004: 3)

Change may therefore derive from what Blackwell called the 'dialogue between broader, societal events and biographies' (Blackwell, 2000: 7). Conspicuous recent examples of the changes in the political climate include the two wars in Iraq and the development of the 'war on terrorism', which have entailed the demonisation of Muslims. Some of these events are post-2001, however the rise in Islamophobia in the 1990s has been described by the Runnymede Trust (1997) and the Terrorism Act (2000) proscribed 17 Muslim organisations. Furthermore debates on immigration and asylum from the late 1990s have generally heightened popular xenophobia. In Brussels similar debates have been conducted against the backdrop of an argument about European values that

must be enhanced and defended (Prodi, 2004) .²

So there have been many 'societal' events providing a background against which ethnic groups have had to ask the question 'Who am I?' On this issue we part company with the conclusion of Simpson and Akinwale that there have been no great shifts in political and cultural forces that could be expected to affect allegiance to labels in the 1990s (2004: 6). This 'historical' source of change of ethnic identification in the census is not one that can be addressed solely through statistical research and this is the case irrespective of the timing of events and censuses. The census will tell us the extent of change and give us some correlates of change but not the *reasons* for change. If historical contingencies are a source of change in self-identities and are considerations when forming responses to census questions then additional qualitative research is required to complement census analysis.

Aspinall suggested that

Identity changes over the lifecourse may happen for many reasons, including the ebb and flow in popularity of some identities, marriage/union formation and dissolution ...Longitudinal research designs are essential to measure this fluidity...(2001: 836)

The extent of ethnic identity change and the correlates of changing identities may

² Interestingly Mr Prodi's commission of twelve distinguished academics concluded that no core European values could be defined After two years of work, they concluded that it is impossible to define what a European cultural space is as it is a process which depends on constant confrontation with the "new". (Agenda 2004-2009, **Tuesday 26 September 2006, EurActiv.com**) See also 'Reflection Group on the Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe'
<http://www.euractiv.com/en/opinion/search-europe-cultural-spiritual-values/article-136125>

be studied longitudinally through the ONS Longitudinal Study of England and Wales which links census and vital event data for one per cent of the population of England and Wales. The data from the 1971 to 2001 Censuses have been linked and information on events such as births, deaths and cancer registrations added to the data set thus produced. The Longitudinal Study microdata are subject to very strict security measures and can be accessed only at ONS offices' safe settings. Data tables may be requested but will only be released after checking for disclosure risk.

The first research to examine identity changing using the LS was conducted by Simpson (2004), Akinwale (2005), and Platt, Simpson and Akinwale (2005) and this work showed that Moore's 1983 contention was correct, people change ethnic group between censuses. Some may not so much change their identity as avail themselves of the wider range of labels available in 2001. For example the most substantial changes were amongst those who, in 1991, were, 'Black other', 'Other Asian' and 'other other', 90 per cent, 66 per cent and 34 per cent respectively changing their census label in 2001. These changes are perhaps not so much evidence of people seeing themselves differently as of changes made possible by the availability of different ethnic categories in 2001. The 2001 categories allowed 'mixed' categories which were only available by writing in under one of the 'other' categories in the 1991 census. These large changes did not therefore necessarily constitute evidence in support of Moore's point but only illustrate the technical difficulties of devising suitable categories for measuring 'ethnic identity' in a census. Nevertheless some with ethnic identities associated with nationality or region Indian, Pakistani and White British, for example, had also changed. Identity change could not therefore be solely attributed to changing census categories

Akinwale, in her very thorough analysis of changing ethnic identities, showed that – for example – there were important environmental factors associated with identity change (2005: 36). Given Moore's original contention that changing

personal circumstances were likely to influence choice of ethnic category we did not explore environmental factors, like (for example) the ethnic composition of the neighbourhoods in which our LS members live. We examined the extent to which domestic and economic circumstances – and *changing* circumstances – were associated with a change of ethnic identity.

There were attempts in the late 1980s to have an Irish category included in the 1991 census. This move came largely from Irish community and welfare groups in London and was led by the Irish Liaison Unit of the London Borough of Haringey. The campaign was prompted both by the emerging evidence of Irish disadvantage and possible discrimination and the publication of the Census of Population White Paper in 1988. The campaign to have an Irish category in the census argued that: the Irish fell within the definition of a ‘racial group’ as defined in the 1976 Race Relations Act but did not figure in the proposed format for the ethnic question; that the Irish clearly were one of the ‘main ethnic groups’ in Britain which it was the declared aim of the government to collect data on; and that the ‘Irish community experiences racial disadvantage akin to the Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities’ (Irish Liaison Unit, 1989). It was decided not to introduce an Irish category in the 1991 census despite sustained lobbying

The OPCS did, however, indicate their willingness to consider including data on the ‘Irish born’, using the country of birth question, alongside ethnic data produced from the 1991 Census. The OPCS therefore added an additional column ‘Born in Ireland’, which amalgamated the Northern Ireland and Irish Republic birthplace groups, at the end of many, but by no means all ethnic group tabulations from the 1991 data. Although this enhanced the data available on the Irish born to a significant degree it was a problematic category. First because Irish birthplace data alongside multi-generational self-identified groups created a misleading impression as the Irish data was based on a single generation and a population category. Therefore the comparison was not of like with like and the situation of the second and subsequent generations was not addressed.

Secondly the statistical compression of the Northern Ireland and Irish Republic categories it was argued 'reduces the extent of apparent disadvantage associated with Irish republic origins' (Walter 1998:75).

The CRE had given tacit support to the submission to include an Irish category in the 1991 Census and in the mid-1990s commissioned research in order to establish the ways in which the processes and practices of racism and discrimination impact on Irish people in Britain. A report *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain* was published by the CRE in 1997 (Hickman and Walter 1997) although by then the CRE had already altered its recommendations on ethnic monitoring advising that an Irish category should be included. This, plus continued lobbying and with support of some MPs meant that ONS were persuaded to include an Irish category in their recommendations to government for the 2001 census.

The second major focus of the research reported here is therefore upon the Irish. Data from ONS and other sources suggest that there has been a steady increase in people identifying themselves as Irish in surveys, from 1.1 percent in 1999 to 11.4 percent in 2004 (GLA Mori Poll, 2004; other qualitative studies also made similar claims, Walter *et al*, 2003)). In the 2001 census 1.2 per cent in England and Wales reported themselves as Irish. There was therefore a very striking difference between census and survey data on Irish identity. The research question here was not to discover the factors associated with ethnic identity *change* but to discover the extent to which persons 'entitled' to claim to be Irish did or did not so *claim*. Research conducted both immediately prior to and soon after the census indicated that the terms 'British' and 'Irish' in the white section of the form were understood to refer to nationality by many who ticked 'White British'. Many reported that had they understood the question as one about ethnic/cultural background they would have ticked 'White Irish' (Hickman *et. al*. 2005). Given Hickman and others' preliminary enquiries we would not expect any significant differences between those who claim and do not claim Irish ethnic

identity because misunderstanding of the question would mask other effects. If, however, the variations did seem to be patterned our aim was to cross-tabulate claimers and non-claimers of Irish identity with the same socio-economic and household variables as the visible minority ethnic groups. We also had evidence from discussion groups and in-depth interviews in four English cities exploring the decisions made by Irish respondents in filling in the ethnic question in the census (Walter et. al. 2003; Hickman et. al. 2005) These data would be used to complement our statistical analysis. Evidence of undercounting of the Irish will be of considerable policy importance given the levels of deprivation and poor health amongst the Irish in Britain (Harding and Balarajan 1996; Hutton and Tilki, 1997).

THE RESEARCH DATA

In the ONS Longitudinal Study comprising just under half a million persons there are over 46,000 visible minority ethnic subjects, but they are subject to higher attrition rates than the sample as a whole (Blackwell, 2003: Table 4.9, Simpson, 2004: Table 1). Using tables from the LS we identified all persons who changed their identity between 1991 and 2001.³ The records of these changers and comparisons with others who do not change their identity comprised one part of the study. It is not possible to identify random changes derived from persons ticking the wrong box or misunderstanding the question and some of these may be a hidden part of more systematic non-random patterns of change. National Statistics' 2006 *Guide to comparing 1991 and 2001 Census ethnic group data*, illustrates the sort of errors that might arise: a person responding to Question 8 reads 'What is your ethnic group?' the first group offered is 'White', the next appears to be 'British' but is, in fact 'White British'. Thus an individual whilst rejecting White might identify as British, not appreciating that he or she was actually responding 'White British' when this was not what they intended. Evidence from the *Labour Force Survey* suggests that this might have been one source of erroneous change of ethnic identity with 2.1 per cent choosing the

³ Appendix B shows the detailed derivation of the sample used.

1991 Black Caribbean ethnic identity switching to the White 2001 identity at the next survey. Between the 1991 and 2001 censuses 4.2 per cent of Black Caribbean people made this change. In the *LFS* respondents would need clearly to identify as White or Black before having an opportunity to reply 'British'. (*Guide*: 4.30)

Some people who migrated to the UK, or who are descended from immigrants may come to see themselves as 'hyphenated British', as 'British Indian' or 'British Afro-Caribbean' for example. Regrettably the form of the census question does not enable respondents to differentiate between Asian and hyphenated Asian-British identities (or Black and Black-British) because the two categories are conflated in 'Asian or Asian British' ('Black or Black British'). Under these headings the former respondents may choose a *nationality* (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) to indicate their *cultural background*. The latter are offered two *regions* (the Caribbean and Africa) to indicate their cultural background. So the 1991 and 2001 censuses do not enable us to disaggregate and explore the extent of 'hyphenation' amongst migrants and their descendants. (See also Simpson, L., 2002: 80)

We excluded from our study all those with imputed ethnic group in 2001 because we were interested in the changes of those who *chose* to change ethnic group. We could not exclude those who were imputed in 1991 because imputation is not flagged in the LS data set for 1991.⁴ We also excluded over 8,000 LS members who were not at home in 1991 but reported as 'visitors' because we could not explore their 'home' domestic circumstances in 1991.

We expected to find, and found, some ethnic identity changes that are 'causally and meaningfully adequate' – in other words they are statistically significant differences representing changes that can be made sense of from actors' points of view.

⁴ For a discussion of the likely impact of imputation see Platt *et al* (2005: 36)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: (1) CHANGING ETHNIC IDENTITY BETWEEN 1991 AND 2001

The inclusion of a religion question in 2001 gave some interesting results for ethnic identity change, the odds of a White person (1991) changing their ethnic group in 2001 if they were Muslim or Hindu were so high as to suggest that these might have been people who simply ticked the wrong ethnicity box in 1991. Similarly people who were Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi in 1991 were very much more likely to change ethnic group if they reported 'Christian' in 2001

It was immediately evident from our data that broadly 'domestic' variables produce the highest chances of changing ethnic group for all ethnic groups. This highly significant finding was made by Akinwale in 2005 (*op. cit.*: 37). She showed that people living in mixed households were much more likely to change ethnic identity than those who did not. We have gone beyond this firstly to consider the association between ethnic identity change and *changing* household composition and secondly to examine the composition of mixed household in terms of the ethnicity of the head of household. Thus for White, Black Caribbean and Black Africans, having a head of household of a different ethnic group in 1991 – who presumably made the entries in the census – raises the chances of change in 2001 above merely being in a mixed household. Marrying someone from a different ethnic group between the censuses raises the chances of changing ethnic identity very substantially for White people and for Indians also.

Identity, including ethnic identity, we would argue, is not the property of an individual alone but derives from the relationships and networks within which the individual is embedded; family, kinship and community. The LS data can not, of course, demonstrate or *prove* this to be the case but we believe they lend plausibility to such an hypothesis.

For White Longitudinal Study members, the odds of changing ethnic group are

more than doubled by being a student and nearly doubled for a Black Caribbean who was a student in 1991. Becoming a student has traditionally entailed leaving the parental home and becoming a more independent person – and perhaps also exposing one to ideas about identity and self. Simpson and Akinwale noted that

Specific events that trigger acceptance of new labels are not easily identified, but it appears that changed personal circumstances allow a reconsideration of identity, such as migration to a country with racialised discourses (Howard 2003; Samers 2003), an environment outside the household (Harris and Sim, 2002), and one would infer this might also apply to leaving the family home. “Greater anonymity leads to racial classifications that are more consistent with contemporary understandings of race”, was the broad conclusion from a study showing greater adoption of multiple racial origins in school than in teenagers’ homes at a time of public acceptance of diversity in the USA (Harris and Sim, 2002: 624). (Simpson and Akinwale, 2004: 9)

This seems to us to be an entirely plausible explanation for student status to raise the chances of changing ethnic identity. This effect is not, however, noted for Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Longitudinal Study members and we might *speculate* that for them becoming a student does not perhaps entail any loosening of family ties – maybe they are more likely to continue living at home while students. That age is an important consideration for White and Black Caribbean Longitudinal Study members but not for Indians and Pakistanis, perhaps underlines the effects of stronger family ties in the latter cases, but again this must be a speculative conclusion requiring further research that can not be undertaken with the Longitudinal Study (but see Dench *et. al.* 2006),.

Living alone in a single person household in 1991 also raised the chances of changing ethnic group for all but the Black Africans *perhaps* underlining the extent to which ethnic identity may be buttressed by close family and kin.

These 'domestic' findings to some extent support Moore's contention made to the Home Affairs Committee in 1983 but, of course, the numbers involved are a very small proportion of the Longitudinal Study sample, the great majority of whom kept the same identity from 1991 to 2001.

If we may take not owning a house and lacking any educational qualifications as a proxy for low socio-economic status then we broadly confirm Akinwale's more detailed analysis of social class that lower social classes, notably the 'unclassified' are more likely to change ethnic group (2005: 39 and see also Table 8).

If we examine social mobility – moving from manual into managerial and professional occupations between 1991 and 2001 we see that upward mobility only effects the chances of White and Pakistani LS members changing ethnic group. Given our original contention that ethnic identity was to some extent contingent and therefore likely to change with changing circumstances, this is a slightly surprising finding. We might have expected changed socio-economic status to be associated with ethnic identity change. But for four of our six ethnic groups it is not significant – it is the domestic factors that are important.

We conclude that in addition to any changes that might arise from the availability of different ethnic labels between censuses, a small number of people do change ethnic group and these changes are mainly associated with people's changed domestic circumstances between the censuses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: (2) CLAIMING ETHNIC IDENTITY

In this section we present findings about those who were 'entitled' to claim an Irish identity. We already knew from the first release of 2001 Census data that in England 89.3 per cent of those born in the Republic of Ireland (hence forth

Ireland) ticked the 'White Irish' box, 26.3 per cent of those born in Northern Ireland did so and that 23.3 per cent of those ticking 'White Irish' were born in England, Scotland or Wales, equivalent to approximately 8 per cent of the potential second-generation population in England (Walter 2001). Examining those born in Ireland first, the data shows that just over one in ten of those born in Ireland did not select White Irish in the 2001 census. Of these, 90.5 per cent selected British, 3.1 per cent Other White, 3.1 per cent Mixed race and 4 per cent selected one of the remaining categories.

The LS data revealed that those not ticking 'White Irish' are concentrated in the older age groups amongst the Irish-born. The odds of not selecting the Irish category increased significantly from 50 years of age onwards (see Table 3 in Appendix C). This finding almost certainly reflects different phases of immigration from Ireland since 1945. The two key periods were the late 1940s–early 1960s and the 1980s. In the 1950s people left a demoralised Ireland, at a rate of over 50,000 a year, despite the country having recently declared its status as a Republic and cemented this by leaving the Commonwealth. The exodus of a rural population and their settlement in urban areas of England, where they encountered 'No Irish' signs when seeking accommodation, combined for some to produce a 'head down' approach to life in Britain. The 1980s' migration took place at a time of economic difficulty and considerable national debate about renewed heavy outward migration. Nevertheless with EU membership in 1973, the breaking of the link between the Irish Punt and Sterling in 1979 and some experience of economic revival and expansion in the 1960s and 1970s Ireland was a more self-confidently independent nation in the 1980s compared with the 1950s. The evidence suggests that for younger immigrants, who knew a very different Ireland, and arrived in Britain at a time when 'No Irish' signs were illegal, and for whom there was a stronger chance of returning, there was a greater likelihood of retaining and asserting their identity as Irish. Another factor that may also contribute to this finding is that amongst the oldest people living in Britain there will be some who were born before Irish Independence in 1922 and

therefore will have been deemed British citizens at birth. It is also possible that length of residence for some and antipathy towards a country they had to leave produced for others an inclination to select 'White British'.

Turning to the Northern Irish born, of our sample of 2,226, 26.4 per cent selected Irish in the census question and 73.6 per cent did not. Of the majority not selecting 'White Irish' 97.5 per cent of them selected 'White British', 1.4 per cent 'Other White' and 1.2 per cent other categories. Using the LS we have not been able to supply any definitive account of the variation in selecting 'White Irish' or not by those born in Northern Ireland. The logistic regressions we ran did not reveal any of the social characteristics we were testing to be significant in explaining the likelihood of selecting Irish. The obvious social characteristic to have cross-tabulated with the sample was religion. In 2001 the population of Northern Ireland was 40.3 per cent Catholic and 45.6 per cent Protestant (Northern Ireland Census 2001 Key Statistics, 2002). It was not possible to correlate religion with claiming or not claiming Irish identity in the LS because in the 2001 Census in England and Wales the question on religion included Christian as a single conglomerate category. This was a major disadvantage but not because we would expect a perfect fit. Our expectation would be that, for example, many Catholics would select White British, but we anticipate that religion would produce a statistically relevant relationship because of the links between religious background and ethno-national identifications in Northern Ireland. This omission is regrettable because migration from Northern Ireland increased sharply between the 1970s and 1990s (Hickman and Walter 1997) and it would be interesting to know if religious denomination was more relevant than other social characteristics, none of which produced statistically significant findings, and therefore indicate the extent to which a central cleavage in Northern Irish society continued to be relevant on migration to another part of the United Kingdom.

The second generation sample of 10,012 included an overwhelming majority who

did not select 'White Irish', 92 per cent, most of whom selected 'White British'. The LS data on the second generation did, however, produce findings showing greater differentiation according to social characteristics amongst this sample than amongst the other two samples. Guided by previous research (Hickman et. al. 2001) we sub-divided the second-generation sample into three groups according to the number and gender of Irish-born parents. This proved to be a salient distinction as those with two Irish-born parents were significantly more likely to select 'White Irish' than those with one parent born in Ireland. The logistic regressions also showed that age was significant in not selecting the Irish category, while gender, education (having a degree) and being single increased the odds of the second generation selecting 'White Irish'. A young, single man under 40 years of age with a degree and two Irish-born parents is statistically many times more likely to have selected White Irish than a woman, over 40 years with a partner but with no degree and one Irish-born parent. We found these statistically significant relationships even when the overriding finding was that 92 per cent selected 'White British'. There is a story here of complex processes and further discussion of these second generation findings is the basis of a separate article (Hickman 2011).

In the 1990s when the ethnic question was subject to trials the 'White' section had just one subcategory 'Irish'. This was included in response to users telling the ONS that an Irish sub-category was necessary for the policy reasons noted earlier. The trials found that there was some association of 'Irish' with nationality and there was some suspicion as to why there should be an Irish category because it was the only category offered as a sub-division of 'White'. It should be recalled that the question was being trialed before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, a period in which surveillance of the Irish population in Britain was still at high levels. Part of the reason why the categories 'White British' and 'White Other' were introduced was to avoid this resistance to an Irish category (for discussion of the trials, the results and their consequences for the eventual wording of the 2001 ethnic question, see Dixie 1998). Ballard (1996) at

the time advanced the view that the best that can be achieved in relation to ethnicity is establishing the community with which respondents feel themselves to be most closely affiliated because:

All the indications are that Yemenis, Somalis, Filipinos, Greek and Turkish Cypriots, Poles and Jews, let alone the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish, are very willing to identify themselves as such, always provided that this is not regarded as evidence that they are in some way not-British. (Ballard 1996: 25)

For Irish migrants in general this relationship to Britishness does not apply as virtually 90 per cent selected the 'White Irish' category in 2001 when it was juxtaposed to 'White British'. The fact that Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom to have seceded and that the war of independence is part of the mythology of the Irish state makes it highly unlikely that the majority of Irish-born citizens when offered a choice between 'British' and 'Irish' would do anything other than select the latter category. Our aim was to discover any salient social characteristics that would help explain why 10 per cent did not so claim.

But while juxtaposing 'White British' and 'White Irish' for those born in Ireland was advantageous the contrary was the case for the second generation. The division in the 2001 Census question of the white category into British/Irish/Other was perceived by many of the second generation both as a question about nationality and as mirroring the challenge many experienced in everyday encounters in English cities – 'Are you English or Irish?' – when they articulate their Irish allegiances (Hickman et. al. 2005). Within the realm of public discourse the challenge to them was to affirm their Britishness in a variety of contexts. These everyday challenges often produce a defensive and low-key response. Thus a census form can be interpreted as such a challenge and produce a variety of responses. Other factors have also been established as significant for the second generation Irish when responding to the Census question. These

include their acknowledgement that in Ireland they are perceived as 'English/British' and this means that many consider they do not have the right to claim Irishness as they were born in England (Walter 2004). In England and Wales, however, if the White section of the Census ethnic question had been broken down in terms of 'English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish and Other' then there is good reason to surmise that more, although it is difficult to gauge how many, second generation Irish would have selected Irish (Walter 2006). This would not, however, have been very satisfactory because the removal of British as a category would produce problems for other groups, including, for example, some Jewish people (Graham and Waterman 2005) or a substantial number of those born in Northern Ireland. However, over half of a sample of second generation Irish in previous qualitative research indicated they wanted a mixed category, 'Irish-British' (Walter 2006, Hickman et.al. 2005). If this featured on the census form it is likely many more of the second-generation Irish population would select it. All of this suggests that the wording on the form is critical. The proposed split between a national identity question and an ethnic question in the 2011 Census may go some way to resolve the dilemma of capturing hybrid identities but it is not a full recognition of hybridity within the 'White' category.

It is interesting to compare these data about England and Wales with the situation in Scotland. In Scotland 32.8 per cent of those selecting 'White Irish' were second generation, born in Scotland or England (Scottish Government Statistics 2004), a higher proportion than in England and Wales. These are not completely like for like figures because in Scotland the White section of the ethnic group question had four sub-categories compared with three in England and Wales. However, the one White sub-category that was the same in both Censuses was 'White Irish'. On the face of it many would argue that to find a greater proportion of those of Irish descent selecting 'White Irish' in Scotland is not a surprising result given the historical significance of migration from Ireland to Scotland. Irish migration in the nineteenth century formed a greater proportion of the population than in England and the proportion of the population of Irish

descent is correspondingly greater in Scotland. However, since 1945 Scotland has not been a major destination for new Irish immigration compared with the English midlands and the South-East of England. Thus the proportion of the Irish-born in the population has declined (although Scotland remains significant as a destination for those of a Protestant/Unionist background leaving Northern Ireland). Qualitative research in Scotland suggests that the vast majority of people of Irish descent for whom their Irish background is important nevertheless rarely select 'Irish' labels to describe themselves, regardless of whether they came from a Catholic or Protestant background. Place of birth (Scotland), not being accepted as Irish by the Irish-born and never having been to Ireland as children were all significant factors influencing the selection of 'Scottish' by people of Irish descent (Walls 2005). These are similar reasons to those given in England by the Irish descent population for not selecting 'White Irish'. One substantial difference between the two locations is that in Scotland many people are still fundamentally classified in terms of their religious background. The continuing salience of religion as a signifier of difference was reflected in the fact that the religious question in the Scottish Census disaggregated the Christian category unlike in England and Wales.

This possible undercounting of the second-generation Irish for whom Irish identifications are meaningful in both England and Wales and in Scotland is important, although perhaps most so in England, for the following reasons: substantial under-enumeration of the longitudinal 'Irish' population fuels claims about 'white' sameness which are not proven and masks possible disadvantages and discriminations; the multitude of ways in which Irishness remains a significant element of individual ethnic identities receives no public recognition; it could produce a shortfall in data that may explain persistent social penalties of the Irish in England across three generations, especially in health.

CONCLUSIONS

The key factors associated with changing recorded ethnic identities between censuses were identified in this research. The availability of 'mixed' categories in 2001 enabled nearly one fifth of Black Caribbean people to change identity. In the case of 1991 'Black Africans' 233 people or 21 per cent changed their ethnic identity between censuses. Nevertheless ethnic identity as reported by the census is remarkably stable, especially where linked to a national origin (British, Indian, Pakistani). The research presented here shows that recorded differences between the two censuses are mainly associated with *changes* in domestic circumstances, especially marital, household composition and living arrangements. Changes in socio-economic status do not have a similar effect.

The Irish category was included for the first time in 2001 but in discussions of ethnic identity it is often ignored. Studies that compare 1991 and 2001 inevitably amalgamate the White category but in other cases the Irish are inexplicably omitted from analyses (for example, Dorling and Thomas 2004). In other accounts the Irish category is included in some tables but amalgamated into the White category in others (for example, Owen 2006). In yet other instances the Irish category is dismissed as irrelevant. Voas (2007) writes that 'The "White-Irish" category is already a waste of space, because three quarters of those in England who choose it were actually born in Ireland, while millions of people of Irish descent ignore it'. Obviously such a comment is not only unsupported by any further empirical investigation but also takes responses to census categories at face value. Census data are enmeshed in a political process as we sought to demonstrate earlier (see also Nobles 2000, Howard 2006) and the ethnic categories used in the census are inevitably a site of political contestation. Equally filling in a census form is a political act and this is most clearly shown in responses to the ethnic question. Consequently the issue is not so much how the Census reflect social reality but rather how it becomes part of constructing that reality (Kertzer and Arel 2002).

Individuals may struggle to fit their version of their identity(ies) into the rigid categories of a census form. Others, perhaps the majority, may tick a box in an unreflective way. This research, read alongside qualitative data where it is available, gives us glimpses of the processes in which individuals may engage in the act of responding to the ethnic question. Those who changed their ethnic designation between 1991 and 2001 in the four populations reported and those who claimed an Irish identity amongst the second-generation Irish population (the minority in each case) show us something of what is going on underneath the surface of seemingly stable majorities.

There remain a series of questions about what the census actually measures. The OPCS initially agreed with some social scientists and doubted whether questions of ethnic identity were suitable subjects for the census unless as proxy for 'race'. Later OPCS needed to make a pragmatic response to political and administrative demands so that a question that they thought 'impossible' in 1966 was included in the 1991 and 2001 censuses. Perhaps we should think of the census data as measuring 'administrative ethnicity' – a pragmatic formulation with high value for the administration of equality policies across a wide range of institutions. People are increasingly familiar (especially in the public sector) with monitoring for gender, disability, age *and* 'ethnic origin'. As the purpose of this monitoring becomes more widely understood people learn to play the game and tick an appropriate box to indicate the category to which they belong for monitoring purposes. How people 'really' see themselves is much more complex, changeable and nuanced, rooted in national origins, family and community life, changing social contexts and political exigencies. Ethnic identity in this latter sense is not amenable to analysis through censuses, although having to tick a box in a census schedule or on a monitoring form is undoubtedly one element in the process of constituting the social reality of ethnic identifications.

APPENDIX A

The 1991 and 2001 census: ethnic questions:

11 Ethnic group

Please tick the appropriate box.

If the person is descended from more than one ethnic or racial group, please tick the group to which the person considers he/she belongs, or tick the 'Any other ethnic group' box and describe the person's ancestry in the space provided.

White	<input type="checkbox"/>	0
Black-Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Black-African	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Black-Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>please describe</i>		
<input type="text"/>		
<input type="text"/>		
Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>	5
Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>	6
Any other ethnic group	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>please describe</i>		
<input type="text"/>		
<input type="text"/>		

8 What is your ethnic group?

◆ Choose ONE section from A to E, then ✓ the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background.

A White

British Irish

Any other White background,
please write in

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B Mixed

White and Black Caribbean

White and Black African

White and Asian

Any other Mixed background,
please write in

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

C Asian or Asian British

Indian Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Any other Asian background,
please write in

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D Black or Black British

Caribbean African

Any other Black background,
please write in

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

E Chinese or other ethnic group

Chinese

Any other, *please write in*

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

APPENDIX B

The following table shows that whilst we had 419,000 persons in the Longitudinal Study who were present at both the 1991 and 2001 censuses, not all could become cases in this research; the two largest instances were those who only appeared as visitors in 1991 and those who had their ethnic identity imputed in the 2001 census, cases where age or gender did not tally between the censuses were also rejected. The outcome was that we had to reject over 24,000 cases, leaving us with 394,464 usable cases.

Derivation of Study Sample	
LS Members present at both 1991 and 2001	419,100
Cases removed from initial sample	
Visitors at 91	8,246
Students not at term-time address	1,382
Sex discrepancies 1991/2001	2,668
Age discrepancies 1991/2001	1,717
Case with imputed ethnic identity 2001	8,591
Ethnic Identity changers suppressed due to low cell counts	15
Rejected for other reasons	2,017
Total rejected cases	24,636
Study Population	394,464

APPENDIX C

Table 1 : All Ethnic group changers 1991 – 2001				
Ethnic group	Number	Changing ethnic group in 2001	Percentage changing ethnic group	
White	371,985	1,806	0.5	
Black Caribbean	3,093	630	20.4	
Black African	1,103	233	21.1	
Black Other	1,112	1,011	90.9	
Indian	7,778	599	7.7	
Pakistani	3,889	250	6.4	
Bangladeshi	1,457	66	4.5	
Chinese	993	78	7.9	
Other	3,054	1,049	34.3	
Total	394,464	5,722	1.5	

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study.

Table 2: Odds of changing ethnic identity 1991 – 2001

Variable	White	Black Caribbean	Black African	Indian	Pakistani
Living in a multi ethnic household	66.6	3.6	2.0	8.4	10.2
Marrying person from different ethnic group	51.0		?		
Head of house different ethnic group	22.0	5.4	5.7	4.1	3.3
Born overseas	7.3	1.4	4.0	1.3	1.4
Single person household	5.4	4.0	1.3	4.8	3.8
Student in 1991	2.6	1.9			
Student 2001	2.5	**			
Age	2.5	2.5	1.6		
Not an owner-occupier in 1991	2.0	1.7	2.7	1.7	
Not an owner-occupier in 2001	1.8	1.9	1.7	1.9	1.9
Not head of household in 1991	1.6	1.8			
Educational qualifications	1.6			1.6	1.5
Head of household changes 1991 - 2001	1.4	1.6		1.8	
Upward occupational mobility	1.4				2.2
Marital status change	1.3			1.5	
Economically inactive in 1991		1.6			
Not Managerial or professional 1991	1.2				
Not Managerial or professional 2001			1.8		1.8

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

The data set for Bangladeshis is too small for a plausible analysis, there being only 66 ethnic identity changers between 1991 and 2001 in a total LS membership of 1,457. Being in a multi-ethnic household in 2001 made it five times more likely that one would change ethnic group than being in a single ethnicity household. Not being a Muslim and being student also raised the odds of Bangladeshis changing ethnic identity.

Table 3: Odds of claiming and not claiming Irish ethnic identity

Variable	Odds of second generation claiming Irish identity
Male	1.2
Both parents	7.0
Republic-born	
Degree	3.7
	Odds of second generation not claiming Irish identity
Age 40 or over	1.6

Persons born in the Republic aged over 50 were 1.7 times less likely to claim Irish ethnic identity than younger Republic born people.

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

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