



'Sick on the Irish Sea, Dancing Across the Atlantic': (Anti)Nostalgia in women's diasporic remembrance of the Irish revolution

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<CST>(Anti)-nostalgia in Women's Diasporic Remembrance of the Irish Revolution<\>

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In 1936, Bessie Cahill was tasked with supplying the Department of Defence with names and addresses for all Cumann na mBan veterans associated with the Ballymacelligott District Council in North Kerry. However, it was nearly impossible to locate such data for the Keel Branch, "as the majority of them have emigrated [*sic*] and the others have changed their addresses" (July 7, 1936, Cumann na mBan Nominal Roles [hereafter CMB]/116). This external and internal migration affected all Cumann na mBan branches to varying extents: in Newtownmanor, County Sligo, the appointed verification officer lamented that "a number of them are married and gone away that I don't know their present address" (CMB/49), while, in South Down, only six of the twenty-strong membership of the Warrenpoint Branch could be named or located (CMB/60). Levels of emigration prove startling in some rural coastal areas. In Dungloe, County Donegal, Ventry, County Kerry, and Beara, County Cork, between 60 percent and 70 percent of Cumann na mBan members had emigrated by the mid-1930s (Aiken 2020b).

The substantial displacement of people following the Irish revolution (1916–1923), particularly of women, has little place in the hegemonic state-sanctioned commemorative history of the period. This is perhaps best understood as evidence of the "active forgetting," to use Aleida Assmann's terms (2008, 98), of certain aspects of the past that were at odds with the state-building project of the fledgling Free State. Rather, the highly competitive revolutionary commemorative culture of the 1920s and 1930s was dominated by "heady stories of heroism, honour and

brotherhood” that circumvented the more controversial, divisive, and violent aspects of the War of Independence (1919–1921) and Civil War (1922–1923) (Flanagan 2015, 7, 22). Typical of such post-conflict nationalist remembrance, the actual experiences of women were converted into symbolic, romantically conceived significance; women's militant activism was submerged by the weeping widow “Mother Ireland” trope or occluded by the allegorical figure of the patriotic, yet always ancillary, *Róisín Dubh* (Gillis 1998, 10; Young 2009, 1779).

Yet, paradoxically, the documentation of the absence of these emigrant women in the 165 Cumann na mBan Nominal Rolls, which were released online in 2014, serves as an aide-mémoire to their existence. As Guy Beiner outlines, for all its power, “official commemoration was not able to totally wipe out the deviant narratives of remembrance,” which Michel Foucault designated as “counter-memories” (Beiner 2007, 305). Since the beginning of the decade of centenaries, various scholarly and public endeavors have successfully reinscribed many previously elided women's voices into the narrative(s) of the revolution. The phenomenon of displacement and emigration among female activists, however, demands more sustained critical attention.

On a local level, large-scale emigration poses a problem for social remembrance as it disrupts “the social frameworks” that Maurice Halbwachs outlines as essential for supporting collective memory (1992, 38–40; Beiner 2018). Who remembered Cumann na mBan in Allihies on the Beara Peninsula after nearly all its membership had relocated to America and Canada? How does a community remember when it no longer exists in the geographic place of origin? Drawing on an array of disparate narratives—including letters, memoirs, and fictional self-representation—this chapter aims to recuperate a number of the “counter-memories” of female revolutionary émigrées in order to consider the mechanisms and spaces available to women for coming to terms with the past within diasporic communities. Furthermore, it explores how these memories of

revolution can oscillate between nostalgic and anti-nostalgic remembrance and how nonconventional forms of memory, such as Kathleen Hoagland's autobiographical novel *Fiddler in the Sky* (1944), can offer more complex readings of women's diasporic remembrance than first-person testimony.

Exile has historically functioned as “the nursery of nationalism” (Lord Acton, cited in Brundage 2016, 9), yet emigration also problematizes nationalist beliefs in its severing of one's patriotic ties to the nation. While the significant decline of the southern Protestant population has sparked much historical debate (see Hart 1998; Bielenberg 2013; Fitzpatrick 2013a), historians have been slower to document the post-Civil War emigration of IRA veterans (see Hanley 2009; G. Foster 2012, 2015; Wilk 2014). Recent studies on the flight of de Valera's “Wild Geese” have largely glossed over the emigration of female republicans, thus emulating the long-established narrative of exile that centers on involuntary, generally male, exiles whose emigration is attributed to the wrath of the British colonial system (see Miller 1988). This forced exile narrative belies the reality that between 1871 and 1971 the majority of emigrants who left Ireland were young single women, a demographic trend that went against the grain of general European emigration patterns (Travers 1995, 148). The striking scholarly neglect of these women's experiences continues to be addressed (Diner 1983; Nolan 1989; Ryan 2001b; Whelan 2015; Trew 2016; Redmond 2019), but questions remain regarding how this masculine trope of exile complicates the memory making of female activists.

The prevention of emigration was one of the key aims of the broader nationalist movement. The First Dáil, established in January 1919, issued a decree banning emigration without written sanction (*Dáil Éireann* 1920) and the Irish Volunteers later denounced emigration “as desertion in the face of the enemy” (cited in MacCarthy 1953). From the early twentieth century, cultural

nationalist movements shared an anti-emigration agenda. Patrick Pearse claimed that it was the obligation of all Gaelic Leaguers—a movement from which a great many of Ireland's future revolutionaries were to emerge—to protest against the “emigration terror” (1903, 3). This discourse was highly gendered, and women feature heavily in the widespread antiemigration diatribes of the period. Popular anti-emigration short stories typically focused on the treachery and selfishness of rural female emigrants as well as the moral, spiritual, and physical decline awaiting them in the seedy underworld of the diasporic city (Aiken 2018, 97–99). Within this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the assistance of Cumann na mBan was considered “imperative” in stemming the tide of emigration (Letter from Séamus Fitzpatrick 1920, cited in Furlong 2009, 82). Indeed, potential emigrants were directly targeted by the IRA; some were “relieved of their passports” (Daly 1953, 38), while others were ordered to be “removed from cars and trains” (Fitzgerald 1954, 6).

Such drastic measures were perhaps thought to be temporary. Seán O'Faoláin remembered in 1953 that many had hoped “that once we got a native government we would soon put a stop to all that” (1953, 140). In contrast, the establishment of the Free State coincided with a renewal of emigration to the extent that the IRA imposed a blanket ban on emigration, with the chief of staff of the IRA Frank Aiken writing that the “emigrant who could earn a livelihood at home and yet leaves is a deserter” (University College Dublin Archives [hereafter UCDA] p104/2561, n.d.). However, the economic reality soon vanquished this political rhetoric. Writing to the chief of staff during her Australian tour, activist and revolutionary Helena Molony emphasized the helplessness of the situation and the necessity of incorporating these “deserters” into the republican movement: “Frank, there are a lot of our men here who emigrated and people have asked me how they should be treated. I've explained that of course they deserted my country but that as the conditions were

terrible it was only weakness—though bad weakness—and that now they're here they ought to be encouraged to work here. If they're turned down they'll be lost forever and lots of them are very keen to work" (November 9, 1924, UCDA p69/37 [112]). The IRA thus jettisoned their anti-emigration policy in July 1925 on the condition that IRA members who emigrated put themselves on the Foreign Reserve List to be available for duty abroad (G. Foster 2012, 213). At least two women were included on this list to provide intelligence, namely Celia McDonald and Emily McMahon, who were associated with the North Mayo Brigade and supposedly employed as nurses in London (Letter from Adjutant General to Adjutant North Mayo Brigade, August 4, 1923, UCDA p69/167 [10]). The splintered and numerically weakened post-Civil War Cumann na mBan continued to protest against widespread emigration and tended to lay the blame at the foot of the Free State government, thus perpetuating the long-established "involuntary exile" trope. Writing in the republican weekly *An Phoblacht*, the president of Cumann na mBan Eithne Ní Chumhaill (Coyle) lamented that "tá fir agus mná, buachaillí agus cailíní, ag éalughadh as Éirinn gach lá do nochtann an ghrian a geob os cionn uisce na mara" (Men and women, boys and girls, are escaping out of Ireland every single day that the sun rises over the sea) ("Cúis na Saoirse" *An Phoblacht*, January 10, 1931; see O'Leary 2000, 255).

Despite such public anti-emigration pleas, private correspondence and memoirs demonstrate a deeper understanding of the complex motivations for emigration. Many republican women found themselves in dire straits in the aftermath of the conflict and suffered for their political stances, regardless of which position they took on the question of the Anglo-Irish Treaty (McAuliffe 2018a). Anti-Treaty women were particularly targeted. The six female Teachtaí Dála (members of the government ministry) who rejected the treaty were scapegoated for the slide to Civil War, and over 681 anti-Treaty women were interned between 1922 and 1924 (C. McCarthy

2014, 227; Matthews 2010, 257; McCooole 2015, 244–265). Even after the conflict, republican women were denounced from church podiums and found themselves in precarious economic positions. Despite her condemnation of emigration, Eithne Coyle understood the realities; she recalled that after her release from prison, “I had none [a job]. Nor could I find any” (cited in Mac Eoin 1980, 158).

Máire Comerford, one of the most prominent Cumann na mBan activists, was less sympathetic to emigrants. In a letter to fellow journalist and activist Molly Flannery, she bemoaned that Ireland was “a nation of people that all want white-collar jobs; it [emigration] is the penalty of too much intelligence wrongly directed” (Molly Flannery Woods Papers). However, Comerford's letter may reflect the sacrifices she made to stay in Ireland. She famously ran her own poultry farm in an effort to eke out a living:

<EXT>I was one of the few who managed to stay in Ireland when thousands left. The Republicans were in abject distress and poverty. I had left Dublin and was living on a hill in Wexford. I didn't have any money, but I had credit in the shops because I had belonged to people who were able to run bills in shops. The shopkeepers wouldn't believe I had no money. It was very useful to me because only for that I wouldn't have survived. I had less and less contact with anybody else because every Republican had a very long period of being boycotted. You couldn't get any employment associated with the state at all without signing an oath of allegiance, and we wouldn't sign that. (cited in Griffith 1998, 314)<\>

<FL>But Comerford was actually one of the many republicans to flee to the United States after her release from Cork jail in early 1924. The republican movement arguably used the preponderance of single female emigrants as a veil to conceal their activities, and women often delivered messages across the Atlantic: Mimi Plunkett traveled alone from Liverpool to New York

in March 1916 with a coded message for John Devoy, while Min Ryan made the same unaccompanied journey a number of months later (“UK Incoming Passenger Lists”; “New York, Passenger and Crew Lists”). Anti-Treaty Cumann na mBan activist Kitty O’Doherty similarly couriered \$50,000 in a body belt from her adopted home in Philadelphia to Eamon de Valera in the summer of 1922 (O’Doherty 1999, 61). While publicly condemning emigration, IRA chief of staff Frank Aiken sardonically wrote to Comerford in January 1924 asking, “Have you got a Ford over there? I suppose you have and that it is your closest friend?” (January 9, 1924, UCDA p69/37 [124]).

Comerford’s own recollections reject any romanticization of emigration. Years later, when composing her memoir, ‘The Dangerous Ground’—which she contends went on paper not “hot from memory” but “*well churned and tested*”—Comerford presents her exile as embodying the final tragedy of the Civil War (“Draft introduction to a book entitled *The Dangerous Ground*” 1956, UCDA LA18/1; emphasis in original). In fact, her memoir ends with a poignant reflection on her arrival in New York and the fractured sense of self engendered by her displacement and falsified identity:

<EXT>Bhí am uafásach agam ag iarraidh gabháil i dtír ón Aquitania. Bhí an turas dona go leor mar le hainm bréige is le pas bréige bhíos an-leasc meascadh le daoine. Ní mór dom a rá fúm féin gur lú go mór mo chuid inní faoina raibh i ndán dom as a bheith ag tréigean na hÉireann agus mo chuid comrádaithe ar an stailc ocras ba mhó riamh. . . . Bhí an Conradh ina bhrat trom fliuch anuas ar thine dhearg ár ndíograise. An tír deighilte; rí Shasana ina rí orainn; ár gcalafoirt ina seilbh acusan; ár bpoblacht thaibhseach ina spreas; áilleacht ár n-aislinge smeartha; feall ar iontaoibh na marbh agus mise, anois thar na bóchna i Meiriceá ar thóir cabhrach. (M. Comerford 1990, 10)

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I had a terrible time trying to disembark from the Aquitania. The journey was fairly awful as with my false name and false passport, I was very reluctant to mingle with other people.

I must say that my own worries about what was in store for me for abandoning Ireland were diminished in the knowledge that my comrades were on the largest hunger strike ever.

. . . The Treaty was a heavy wet cloak which extinguished the red flames of our ardour.

The country divided; the King of England ruling over us; our ports in their possession; our honourable Republic reduced to nothingness; the beauty of our dream smutted; the trust of the dead betrayed; and I, across the sea in America, searching for help. (my translation)<\>

<FL>This concluding section is missing from the extant unpublished English-language version of Comerford's memoir held in the University College Dublin Archives, but her memoir was translated into Irish by an unnamed translator under the title *Lasamar Ár dTinte (We Lit Our Fires)* and serialized in the Cork-based monthly *Agus* between 1981 and 1990. Like many republican women, Comerford chronicled her experiences with a sense "that their experiences were worth remembering" (Pasêta 2013, 1). However, the fact that Comerford's memoir was never published in English and that the Irish version has been omitted, to date, from any historical study is a reminder of the cultural, historical, and even linguistic conditions governing silence and remembrance. Furthermore, it highlights what Assmann refers to as the distinction between "actively circulated memory," which keeps the past present "as the canon," and the "passively stored memory," which preserves the past "as the archive" (2008, 98). While there are a number of autobiographies by male IRA veterans that detail their experiences of emigration (S. O'Connor 1970; Lennon 1971; J. Comerford 1980; Murphy 1998; Flannery 2001)—including J. F.

O'Connor's appropriately titled *An Irish Civil War Exile* (1989)—there are far fewer published autobiographies by women, thus restricting their stories to the “passively stored memory” archives.

Memories of female emigrants, therefore, must be excavated from “the archive” and are frequently no more than fragmentary traces. The online availability of the Cumann na mBan Nominal Rolls and the Military Service Pension Files allow for invaluable insights into the stories of many emigrants, who, unlike Comerford, may never have returned to Ireland nor produced memoirs. That said, the 165 nominal rolls do not reflect the true extent of emigration. Despite instructions from the Department of Defence to supply addresses for all members, in many cases locations are simply not provided. When they are, female emigrants' names are frequently followed by fleeting scrawls—“America,” “gone away,” “somewhere in America,” or “in foreign lands”—suggesting the perceived finality of such emigration. Nevertheless, the nominal rolls do provide the names of over two thousand women who emigrated to the United States, England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and even to China, thus opening the possibilities for further research (Aiken 2020b).

This emigration resulted from various, often complex, personal situations and was frequently driven by hopes for a better life abroad. In his account of a trip around Ireland in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, *The Road Round Ireland* (1926), Pádraic Colum recounts his visit to the Moynihan family in the midland town of Aughnalee. The Moynihan brothers had been active in the IRA. However, Colum is particularly fascinated by the daughter of the house, Brigid, who seems more connected to America than to her homeland:

<EXT>Brigid was a capable girl who regarded things gravely. She was going to America in a while. I asked her if she was sorry to leave home, and she said no. Her brothers and sisters were there; she was going amongst her own—“New York is full of Aughnalee

people.” The newspapers on the settle were American, and the photographs in the room above had come from America. . . . She had no need to leave the country, for she could get a dowry that would make her a good match; still she had no wish to settle here. (Colum 1926, 26–27)<\>

<FL>“Aughnalee” is undoubtedly a fictional place-name. But intriguingly, “Aughnalee” is also the setting for Colum’s 1905 play *The Land* which sets up emigration as an alternative for women to life in “a farmer’s house” (1905, 46). The protagonist, Ellen Douras, is dismissive of the folly with which the local girls speak about visiting fine American theaters, but reveals her true attitude when she discovers her own prospect of emigrating: “I can see what I longed to see. I have a chance of knowing what is in me. . . . No one ever brought me such news before” (1905, 31). While the play could have been understood by theater-goers as representative of the anti-emigration agenda, Colum later clarified, after his own emigration to the United States, that his intention was indeed to illustrate that emigration was not solely driven by economic necessity but rather motivated by “the lack of life and the lack of freedom” in Ireland (1916, vii). The similarities between Brighid and Ellen’s motivations to emigrate two decades apart point to how post-independence emigration built on generations of chain migration and was often tied to women’s personal aspirations.

Just how, then, did the events of the revolutionary period affect emigration? United States immigration records show that Matilda Dudley, then captain of the Garnish Branch Cumann na mBan, County Cork, made her way to Fall River, Massachusetts, at the height of the Civil War in December 1922, accompanied by her sister Maggie (“New York, Passenger and Crew Lists”). But how can we ascertain if her emigration was a result of the political split or tied to economic, familial, or personal ambition? The conspicuous absence of the Irish revolution in Gaeltacht autobiographies points, perhaps, to the fact that, as illustrated by Séamus Ó Grianna in his novel

Tarnгаireacht Mhiseóige, coastal communities had more pressing concerns than the color of the soldiers' uniforms (Ó Grianna 1959, 64). In October 1922, a small fishing boat carrying thirty intending emigrants from Dingle landed in Cobh after being at sea for five days in a desperate attempt to get around rail and road disruptions (Doyle 2008, 207). A report from the *Cork Examiner* titled "Kerry Emigrants: A Trying Journey to Cobh" notes that their plight was "pitiable in the extreme" but also suggests that the passengers were "nearly all women" (*Cork Examiner*, October 23, 1922, 5).

Nevertheless, a number of sources suggest that women's political activism many have informed, or at least hastened, emigration. Female republicans were even threatened with emigration, as occurred in Sligo during the War of Independence when members of Cumann na mBan "were taken out during the night and ordered to be shot or to leave the country" (Sara Bomar to Secretary of the Pensions Board, November 1939, CMB/47). Applications for Military Service Pensions further illustrate how politics was often combined with social and economic factors. Margaret Leonard (née Fleming), after being arrested in Liverpool and interned in Mountjoy Jail, emigrated to New South Wales in 1924 where she had a brother who was a priest (Whitaker 2016b, 183). She euphemistically claims that her own political activity and her husband's IRA membership "compelled" them "for obvious reasons to leave" (Letter to Secretary of the Minister of Defence, December 1, 1934, MSP34E8493). Mary Agnes Davin, who lost her sight in one eye in an attack by the Black and Tans, refers to "personal reasons" and pressure from her family to emigrate to New York (Sworn Statement made before Advisory Committee by Agnes Mary Davin on the June 26, 1936, no. 16824. MSP34REF16824), while Katty Hicks (née O'Driscoll) "had to borrow her fare to America," owing to her impoverished state subsequent to years of keeping an "open purse" for the IRA (Letter from Seán Ó Driscoll to the Department of Defence, April 21,

1936. MSP34REF16920). Equally, Mary Lytle claims that it was a combination of political and economic factors that led her to relocate to Manhattan with her children via Canada in 1926: "I was a widow with two other children to educate and support and in our part of the country it was considered dangerous to be seen working for me even if I paid good wages. We never recovered from the financial loss and in the end were forced to sell out and try to make a new home here" (Letter from Mary Lytle to the Department of Defence, August 30, 1934, MSP34REF58239).

Yet, in the same way that the Famine is rarely presented as the cause for emigration in nineteenth-century Irish–North American fiction (Janssen 2018), it may have been easier to rewrite memories of emigration into the greater nationalist narrative of exile than to admit economic penury, especially when applying for a military pension. Public obituaries also emphasize politically motivated emigration, such as that of Cumann na mBan's Nora Brosnan McKenna, who died in Queens, New York, in 1996, and whose family's wholesale emigration is ascribed to "their Republican beliefs" (Lenehan Nastri 2016). However, another account prepared by the McKenna family, in 2000, details the practical reasons for Brosnan's emigration from her native Castlegregory, County Kerry: "Her family was very poor, and the forge had nearly closed down. All of the young people had begun to entertain thoughts of leaving Ireland for America" ("The Nora McKenna Story," Kilmainham Gaol Collection, 20MS-1D46-27).

Despite the emergence of new archival material, scholars of women in the diaspora point to the various challenges of accessing the stories of female activists. Anne-Maree Whitaker recently stated that "finding information about the later lives in Australia of Easter Rising veterans can still be problematic" (2016, 182). Íde B. O'Carroll pointed to similar challenges when gathering interviews for her oral history *Models for Movers*: "I searched high and low for women who had emigrated to America after being active in the Easter Rising of 1916, the Irish revolution.

. . . I was convinced that some of these revolutionaries must have emigrated to America. I had almost given up hope of finding someone with this history when Mike McCormack wrote a piece on Dubliner, Bridie Halpin, for the *Irish Echo* newspaper on 2 April 1988” (1990, 42). McCormack’s article, “Aunt Bridie—A Woman of Ireland,” was written just a few months after Halpin’s death in December 1987. After sorting through her personal papers in her New York apartment, Halpin’s nephew discovered she had been interned in Kilmainham (McCormack 2015). A booklet she stitched together when imprisoned reveals the idealism of her youth, with one excerpt reading, “Never fear for Ireland, for she has soldiers still. Up Us!” (O’Carroll 1990, 42). While Halpin corresponded privately with Maud Gonne and received Christmas cards from Eamon de Valera, she never told her family about her past (N. O’Sullivan 2007, 167). Sinéad McCoole opens her book *No Ordinary Women* with Halpin’s story, which seems to epitomize the silence of revolutionary women (2003, 13).

It proves difficult to trace the later lives of the emigrant women named in the nominal rolls, which is further complicated by the fact that most women changed their names when they married. Miss Peg Daly, “the principal Cumann na mBan girl in Kildare town” (Dunne 1957, 17), emigrated to Los Angeles in 1926 after being imprisoned during the Civil War (Matthews 2010, 263) – as did many ailing veterans seeking recuperation in a warmer climate (Wilk 2014). A 1930 census return places her on South La Fayette Park Place as a domestic servant and lists Peg’s language as Gaelic (“Los Angeles, California, 1930, Census Return”). For want of sources, this small assertion of national identity from a Kildare, and mostly likely English-speaking, native is possibly the only available archival trace that *might* hint at Peg’s revolutionary background.

The culture of shame surrounding emigration, exasperated by nationalist anti-emigration rhetoric, may also have engendered such long-standing silences. Writing to Sinn Féin Teachta Dála

Mary MacSwiney from Coffeyville, Kansas, a Mrs. Ellie Ferrick attempted to justify her emigration, thus illustrating how women's self-representations were mediated through such perceptions of shame: "What on earth will I do with [Daisy?]. I am really worried about her you know Mary McSwiney, we would never leave our own beloved Ireland if there was any future there for them, she is making it very hard for us and almost insists on going home" (UCDA [ca. 1926] p482/123 [2]). Ferrick's reference to Daisy's insistence on returning to Ireland seems to tactfully counterbalance any accusation of a lack of patriotism.

Cork Cumann na mBan activist Annie Crowley Ford's poignant autobiographical account—self-published by her son Daniel Ford under the title *When I Am Going: Growing Up in Ireland and Coming to America, 1901–1927* (2014)—also hints at the shame of emigration. Crowley recalls her friend Tom Barry's somewhat judgmental comment to her, as she boarded the tender in Queenstown, that he "would rather live on one meal a day in Ireland than three in the United States" (Crowley Ford 2014, 870). Crowley displays similar anti-emigration sentiments and claims that she loathed the idea of going to America after her fiancé Pat Ford: "It was the last place I wanted to go, so I broke off our engagement and told him to take back his ring" (2014, 842). However, Crowley's attachment to her homeplace broke after her brother, Billy, took his own life. She set sail for Boston in 1927 to join Pat, as she "foolishly thought if I went far away from home I would forget, but no matter how many miles you go, you always take your grief with you" (2014, 852). In a conclusion to her memoir, written shortly before her death in 1968, after a troublesome marriage and a rather itinerant life in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Arizona, she laments the instability of life in the United States. During the Civil War, Crowley writes that "we didn't have a moment's peace. They were always raiding us, any time of night or day they would sneak up to the house" (2014, 803). However, life in the United States proved more restless still: "There

was always a sense of security in our life at Kilnahone [County Cork]. We never had to worry about moving. The place was our own, and in all my years in the United States I never felt that sense of security, on rainy nights the feeling of warmth with the rain pelting against the windows and the rain dripping against the house and the rustle of the leaves in the ash trees” (2014, 919).

Despite such sorrow and even regret, a number of women remained highly active in the republican movement among the diaspora and, given the slow retreat of women from the political sphere in post-independence Ireland, may have even gained greater visibility outside of Ireland. Nellie Hoyne Murray was hospitalized after being on hunger strike during the Civil War (Connolly O'Brien 1981, 55). She later served as secretary of the Los Angeles Council of the AARIR (American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic) and as an officer on the Peter Murray Council for twenty five years (“Mrs. Nellie H. Murray [obituary],” *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1955, 74). Her colleague, Máire McKee, with whom she established the underground republican newspaper *The War Bulletin* (O'Mullane 1951, 12), emigrated to Australia, where she made headlines as “A Staunch Worker for Ireland's Cause” and was celebrated by the leaders of Melbourne's Irish community on her eventual return to Ireland (“Miss Máire McKee Farewelled,” *The Advocate* [Melbourne] April 1, 1926, 17). The annual Pearl Flannery Humanities Award is awarded by the New York organization Cumann na Saoirse in honour of Cumann na mBan member Pearl Flannery (née Egan). Flannery was well regarded—not only due to her husband's notoriety for gun-running and as a founder of Irish Northern Aid—but also on account of her active participation in the greater New York Irish community. Despite the anti-emigration mandate of the national organization, in 1926 the local “B” Company of the IRA in Mullinahone held an “American Wake” of sorts for Pearl's mother, Mrs. Egan, on her emigration “in appreciation of the services rendered by herself and family in the cause of Ireland's freedom” (“Left for America—

Mullinavat and District Notes,” *The Kilkenny People*, January 30, 1926, 6). Over the years of her residency in the United States, Pearl was further recognized at numerous events in her adopted home, such as at a dance held in her honor by the New York County Tipperary National and Benevolent Association (*The Irish People* [The New York] February 23, 1985, 12). Whereas Flannery and her husband's political beliefs were celebrated in Irish America, this social role would have been comparatively diminished had she remained in her native Tipperary.

Furthermore, for a number of these women, rather than being repressed, memories of Cumann na mBan activism were recalled in order to scaffold later life events. Bridget Dirrane, born in 1894 on Inis Mór in the Aran Islands, emigrated to Boston in 1927. Complicating the forced-exile narrative, Dirrane remembers her excitement at joining the many revolutionaries and neighbors from the islands who had made for the New World before her: “The whole business of emigration from Aran and Ireland was not that traumatic an experience for me. I didn't mind leaving the native sod at all because quite a number of the volunteers from the troubled times had been deported or had emigrated and General Mulcahy (God rest his soul) helped me in every way, by giving me a lovely testimonial and vouching for me. I also wanted to continue my nursing care abroad, and besides, there were so many Aran people in Boston including my future husband, Ned Dirrane” (Dirrane 1997, 46). Echoing the case of Pearl Flannery, Dirrane's memoir, *Woman of Aran*, indicates the social status afforded to women in the diaspora who were known for their political activism at home. Having been outside of Mountjoy on the day that Kevin Barry was executed, Bridget recollects how she relived these memories: “It was a dreadful time but years after, as I passed by Irish taverns in Boston or sat with Irish people at a sing-song or concert and heard Kevin Barry sung, I was proud to have been there that day” (ibid., 42). While Dirrane is frank in her acknowledgment of the violence of the revolution, her somewhat sentimental

recollection of Barry's death points to the possibly heightened influence of nostalgia on diasporic communities, which Andreas Huyssen attributes to their "tenuous and often threatened status within the majority culture" (2003, 149). While nostalgia is often seen as escapist or regressive, Oona Frawley writes that nostalgia functions as "a safety mechanism designed to bridge past and present for cultures as they experience change" (2005, 3). Indeed, Dirrane fuses her memories of her Cumann na mBan days to her later service as a nurse during World War II, thus demonstrating how emigrant memories are reconfigured through transcultural contact: "I found myself working for the Military Airforce and was sent on a mission to take care of American soldiers down in Mississippi near the Gulf of Mexico. . . . It was my duty to care for and prescribe medication for the sick. Believe it or not I drilled the same as I did many years before with Cumann na mBan" (Dirrane 1997, 61). Autobiographical memory can also be integral to the construction of self-identity, particularly in a diasporic context, as memory, rather than place, becomes key to identity formation. Sister Joseph Teresa O'Sullivan was purportedly imprisoned in Kilmainham during the Civil War and subsequently became a nun in Kenya. Her zeal and commitment to "changing the system" was associated with her revolutionary background. As Sister Columbiere Kelly recounted: "It was one of the great blessings of my work to work with her. She was ex Cumann na mBan and she wasn't afraid of anything. She was a pioneer feminist. When she arrived here, girls weren't educated. The parents kept them at home. But Sister Teresa ran after them and brought them to school. She was a great mathematician and was very tough in insisting that all that mattered was girls' education. She was marvellous" (cited in Coogan 2015, 543).

However, a number of accounts demonstrate that while women's public memories are often mediated through the nostalgic longing for the heroism of the revolution, private forms of remembrance can be at odds with such nostalgia. In an overt display of her nationalism, May

Gahan O'Carroll named her children who grew up in Bexley North, Sydney, after Irish republican figures, including Countess Markievicz, Eamon de Valera, Robert Emmet, Peadar Clancy, Liam Mellows, and Seán Heuston ("There Is Harmony in This Home," *Australian Women's Weekly*, January 1954, 11). She was front and center at the twentieth anniversary of the Rising in Sydney and "carried on her arm an old tattered uniform of dark green, as worn by the Cumann-na-mBan (League of Women) during the Easter-week rebellion" ("Irish Memorial," *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 13, 1936, 2). In 1941, O'Carroll's speech about her continued hopes for Irish independence in the context of World War II was printed in *The Catholic Freeman's Journal*: "We are with our motherland in any action she takes in this war, neutral or belligerent, and we who pass on leave our children after us to pick up the sword and carry on where we left off until Éire is free from north to south and east to west, as the late Seán MacDermott told us in 1916, there can be no peace till freedom" ("Easter Week Recalled at Waverley," *Catholic Freeman's Journal* [Sydney] April 17, 1941, 23).

Despite O'Carroll's public glorification of the revolution, her application for a Military Service Pension demonstrates just how memories are conditioned by the expectations of the intended audience. O'Carroll was imprisoned after the Easter Rising for her role as a "basket girl" and later participated in a number of hunger strikes during the Civil War (File on May Gahan O'Carroll, Kilmainham Gaol Collection 20MS-1B53-10). She was one of a number of women who assert that they emigrated to Australia on the advice of their doctors in order to treat neurasthenia, or what would now be termed post-traumatic stress disorder. This was not uncommon in the aftermath of the revolution, and the IRA made exceptions for veterans to emigrate to warmer climates on medical grounds (Wilk 2014, 27). However, in line with the highly gendered medical understandings of the time, women were not only more likely to be diagnosed with nervous

conditions – which were routinely connected to gynecological health – but women's treatment was also more focused on rest and isolation than men's, which often centered on social reintegration (Aiken 2020a).

When filing her pension application, O'Carroll was "extremely aggravated by the Irish Government's apparent indifference" to her activism and subsequent ill health (Letter from W. G. H. Cable to the Department of Defence, MSP34REF10326). She was further vexed that she only received an E grade (a D grade was the maximum awarded to women) and that her annual pension would not even cover the costs incurred by her recourse to the Dublin-based solicitor, Mr. Dixon, to process her application. The upset caused by the application process led to Mrs. O'Carroll undergoing medical treatment for at least five weeks, according to her daughter Eileen Markievicz (Letter from Eileen Markievicz O'Carroll to Mr. Dixon, August 21, 1935, MSP34REF10326). A newspaper interview with the O'Carroll family in the *Australian Women's Weekly* in 1954 sums up the disjunction between Mrs. O'Carroll's public national pride and her personal distress at being exiled from, and let down by, the country to which she dedicated her youth: "I was a rebel in those wild, wonderful, exciting days, and I nursed many fighting Irishmen who fell foul of a bullet," she said, her eyes moistening with tears. . . . 'But Australia is my country now.'" ("There Is Harmony in This Home," *Australian Women's Weekly*, January 1954, 11). O'Carroll's interview frustrates the idea that nostalgia for a romanticized past could function as a supportive bridge into the future by signaling a clear break from that past and asserting her new national loyalties. O'Carroll's fellow Australian émigré Margaret Fleming also complicates the anticipated nostalgic yearnings often associated with the diaspora. In her initial letter to the minister of defense, Fleming wrote that, "like many previous exiles who came out here, we found a haven" (Letter to Secretary of the Minister of Defence, December 1, 1934, MSP34E8493). As her application was delayed, however,

her narrative began to increasingly comply with the established victim exile narrative: "I regret to say that we did not find this Sunny Land much good except for Sydney [*sic*] climate" (January 23, 1939, MSP34E8493). In a later letter, she even wrote that she would return to Ireland for good if a position could be found for her (December 17, 1939, MSP34E8493).

The only full-length published autobiography of a Cumann na mBan emigrant is Bridget Dirrane's memoir, which was dictated to and compiled by Rose O'Connor and Jack Mahon, employees at St. Francis Community Nursing Unit in Galway, when Dirrane was already 103 years old. The various unseen hands involved in producing Dirrane's autobiography complicate the legitimacy of a literary contact between the author and reader, which Philippe Lejeune referred to as "le pacte autobiographique" (1975). Given the complex circumstances in which such "autobiographical" texts are produced, there has been a turn within the field of memory studies to consider nonconventional genres or subgenres of life writing "as routes into cultural memory" (Saunders 2008, 332). To date, there has been little scrutiny of such non-conventional life writing, including fictional self-representation, in studies of the revolutionary period, despite Tom Dunne's contention that "if all history is a form of fiction, so too, all literary fictions are a form of history, and constitute indispensable historical evidence" (Dunne 1987, 3).

The virtually overlooked novel by Kathleen Hoagland, *Fiddler in the Sky*, published by Harper and Brothers in the United States in 1944, offers a far more complex treatment of female emigration during the revolutionary period. While Hoagland's edited poetry volume, *1000 Years of Irish Poetry* (1947), has been widely reprinted, the novel has received no scholarly attention. But Hoagland's novel very much supports Aidan Arrowsmith's contention that in the context of the Irish diaspora, "life writing is not more real than fiction and, indeed, that confused, second-generation experience is often evoked far more successfully via fiction's heteroglossic quality than

by the more monological mode of much life writing” (2012, 17). Although Hoagland did live through the period in question, and as such is not strictly “second generation,” the novel certainly is a product of what Marianne Hirsch calls “postmemory,” in that the omniscient narrator has access to inherited or secondhand memories and thus “bears witness” on behalf of the family as a whole (2012, 4–5).

The novel traces the impact of the Easter Rising and revolutionary period on the young Pegeen Brendan in a small community in the west of Ireland and documents the political and economic implications of the revolution on the Brendan family, ultimately resulting in Elizabeth Brendan fleeing with her five children to the United States “in continual fear that politics or the Brendans [her in-laws] might reach out to hinder their departure” (285). The novel also addresses a number of social taboos scholars struggle to locate in curated state archives: sexual violence is hinted at through the women’s best efforts to organize entertainments for the British soldiers “to keep them out of harm and away from the servant girls” (62); Pegeen’s mother is treated for postnatal depression; and domestic violence, cloaked behind alcoholism, threatens throughout the novel. Moreover, the novel illustrates how emigration arises from the intersection of family politics, bankruptcy, alcoholism, and domestic violence exacerbated by the turmoil of World War I and the Irish revolution.

The minute details and use of historical dates in Hoagland’s novel frustrated contemporary reviewers who questioned the distinction between fact and fiction: “Although the book is presented as fiction, it is undoubtedly historical in setting, and it is hard to believe that Mrs. Hoagland’s characters are entirely creations of her imagination. It is easier to assume that the book must be at least partly autobiographical, for, like Pegeen, the heroine of the story, the author was born in Ireland and came to America with her family while in her ‘teens’” (Walker 1944, 17). Another

reviewer, in *The Cincinnati Enquirer*—which refers to it as a “remarkable first novel”—equally observes that “there is some parallel between the author’s life and that of her protagonist, Pegeen Brandon [*sic*]. Pegeen grew up in Ireland of the transition period between revolutions, the years of World War I and the early twenties. In her teens she came to America, as did Miss Hoagland, escaping the convulsive birth pangs of Éire” (Lindsey 1944, 5).

Kathleen Hoagland—then Kitty Dooher—hailed from Ballina and, like the protagonist, fled from Ireland during the War of Independence with her mother and four siblings. In the novel, the father, hotelier James Brendan, brings forward a legal objection on March 31, 1920, to his wife’s intended emigration, which results in a number of stressful weeks for the family before they finally board a ship in Queenstown on a Friday morning under the cover of darkness. Immigration records of the Dooher family suggest that the fictional scenario directly matches their own experiences: Mary E. Dooher emigrated from Queenstown on the Kaiserin Auguste Victoria on Friday, May 28, 1920, with her own five children, Kitty, John, Evelyn, Murdock, and Gerald (“UK Outward Passenger Lists”).

In an interview in the New Jersey newspaper *The Record*, Hoagland further elaborates on the connections between the novel and her own experiences and details the family’s struggles in integrating into the community of Bergen County in New Jersey. More revealing, however, are Hoagland’s ambiguous comments on the family’s reasons for emigrating. In a statement marked by ellipsis, she recounts, that her father “[although] a wonderful man . . . got in with a fast crowd, you know, and she [her mother] had to leave . . . It was a lovely life, really, except for that; we had hotels in the country, and my father ran horses . . . a lovely life, but . . .” (Toolen 1982, C19). That Hoagland’s father’s personal troubles are evaded in the interview while the fictional father’s alcoholism is detailed in full in the novel suggests that, as Leigh Gilmore argues, such trauma is

often more successfully rendered in narratives that swerve from conventional forms of autobiographical narrative (2001).

Further reporting in *The Record* conveys Hoagland's devout patriotic fervor: she claims she protested against the Black and Tans in Dublin as a child ("Irish Seeress to Visit Mall," *The Record*, June 28, 1970, 25). She also had fond memories of her second cousin Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave (1920-2017), and claimed the Cosgrave boys could "talk politics in a barroom at 3" (Litterine 1973, 60). She also prided herself on being behind the plans to repatriate writer Ernest Boyd's body after his death in New York in 1946 ("Ashes to Ashes," *The Record*, September 23, 1966, 60). In contrast, the novel is largely condemnatory of the "fanatics" of Sinn Féin, as the local nationalist community turns against Elizabeth Brendan for her entertainment of British officers. Mrs. Brendan's cousin Shaun Fitzhugh—who, like Liam's father the eminent politician W. T. Cosgrave (1880-1965), was sentenced to death for his involvement in the Rising—attempts to persuade her from emigrating, asking "Why should you take the boys and money from Ireland? Every boy and every penny will be needed to make Ireland's freedom possible" (227). Ultimately, the family are chaperoned by British "Spike Island officers" to the tender to ensure their departure is not thwarted by "Sinn Féiners."

Even though Hoagland recalls that the family had a "lovely life" in Ireland, the novel is far from romantic. Indeed, it is largely characterized by an anti-nostalgic impulse that emerges, as Emilie Pine notes in the context of contemporary Ireland, when the past is no longer "a welcome break from the demands of the present" (2010, 8). The small town of Tirawley—in stark contrast with its etymology of "Tír Álainn" (Beautiful Country)—is crippled by social divisions; the district of Bournah is populated by impoverished laundrywomen, "half-fed" fighting dogs, and "close-cropped" children "marked with ringworm" (5). Emigration, in the opening of the novel, is

presented as engendering insanity as the police “strapped and manacled” the town’s mentally ill, including a woman who “hasn’t been right in the head since Bridgie went to America” (7). Yet, emigration is also a necessary escape. The novel’s concluding passage is characterized by the protagonist’s relief as the family catches its final glimpse of the Irish shore:

<EXT,D>“Thank God, *that’s* the last of Ireland, Mamma!”

“I hope I have done right, pet,” Elizabeth said.

“You have, Mamma!”

Pegeen could not bear to see the green now. She got up and made her way to the prow of the liner. Standing there, alone, she looked into the distance of the ocean; a gray mist was over the water. The ship seemed to shudder with delight as it plowed ahead faster and faster, leaving the land behind it. The girl’s eyes were full of tears, she brushed them away. Tomorrow . . . America! (294)<|>

Is Hoagland’s fictional testimony any less authoritative than Máire Comerford’s memoir, which Comerford also acknowledges is subject to the mechanics of memory, “churned and tested”? Hoagland’s final passage points to a less received narrative of female emigration that emphasizes not only female solidarity but also the sense of liberation, and even empowerment, that emigration could provide. This final passage is redolent of Nora Kilduff’s terse account of her emigration to New York in April 1923 (“New York, Passenger and Crew Lists”). Active in the revolution in her native Ballyhaunis, County Mayo, Kilduff recalled being “sick on the Irish Sea, but then dancing across the Atlantic”; a comment that, according to family lore, suggests “freedom from drudgery” (Brian Kilduff Hughes, message to author, January 30, 2019).

When Hoagland’s novel was published in 1944, it also contributed to the production of cultural (post)memory. This evokes the broader question regarding the intergenerational

transmission of memories of the revolution, which merits further study. In her autobiography *Children of the Far-Flung*, Geraldine O'Connell Cusack relates that her mother, Nellie Taaffe, who emigrated to New York from Banteer, County Cork, was, like many others, reticent about the revolutionary period: "Nellie was, to all outward appearances, the most gentle of souls; soft-spoken, kind and generous to a fault, with never a harsh word for anyone. But beneath that gentle exterior was a steely resolve. Few in America knew anything about her early days with Cumann na mBan in the hills of north Cork" (2003, 19). These silences may explain why Maeve Brennan, after her mother Úna's death, struggled to understand the revolutionary background of her quiet "homemaker mother" in New York, even wondering whether her father pressured her mother into using the Gaelicized version of her name (Bourke 2004, 232). Eileen O'Faoláin appears to have been more open with her daughter Julia, who recounts that she "confided snippets of her personal history. . . . Some of which went back to the Troubles, which had petered out a year or so before first Seán, then she herself, left for Boston" (O'Faolain 2013, 12). Yet, Julia O'Faolain's novel *No Country for Young Men* suggests there is no escape from those "snippets" of memory for the succeeding generations. The character of Sister Judith experiences years "of almost catatonic silence" (1980, 192) in the aftermath of the Civil War; for her, "memory was a bog" defined by its "power of suction" (ibid., 12). However, the contemporary characters of the following generation unconsciously mimic the plot of their forebearers, thus illustrating the cyclical nature of family history.

While the retreat into the domestic sphere and sidelining from politics of republican women under the Free State is much debated, the dual aspect of this retreat has yet to be fully considered: that female republicans experienced both inner exile (as second-class citizens) and external exile (through emigration) in the twilight years of the Free State. This chapter goes some way toward

redressing this question and suggests that diasporic memories of the revolution are composed of a complex interplay of nostalgia and anti-nostalgia that often left behind a legacy of silence and even denial in later generations. In fact, in the course of researching for this paper, as I trailed through the Cumann na mBan Nominal Files county by county, I recognized the name of the adjutant and later secretary of the Cumann na mBan Passage West Branch in County Cork: Nellie Stuart (1898–1985). Nellie was an older sister of my great-grandfather. She spent much of her life in the domestic service on the Lower East Side of Manhattan; I had grown up hearing of the generous packages and dollars she sent home, making her nieces and nephews feel like “millionaires”. While family lore suggested that the Stuart brothers “ran away to the U.S. to get safe from the Black and Tans”, Nellie’s revolutionary background was never integrated into family memory. Furthermore, the two older brothers, Tom and John, emigrated in 1927 and 1924, respectively, after British forces left Ireland (“New York, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820–1957”; “US Census Records 1930”).

Not only was Nellie’s revolutionary background expunged from family stories, memory was also distorted to conceal the complexities of the Civil War. Nellie’s story serves as just another reminder of the discomfort evoked by female activism and a further example that the glorification of war and exile was reserved for male combatants. For Richard Kearney, these unconscious transgenerational memories form “repressed wounds” that “scar the psyche and return to haunt us again and again” (Kearney and Gallagher 2017, 26). If catharsis can be achieved through narrative, the recovery of such lost memories is perhaps one of the most crucial aspects of this decade of commemorations.

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<ECN>Notes<\>

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