'CARE (PACKAGES) IN A TIME OF CRISIS: IRISH EXPATRIATES IN GERMANY, TRANSNATIONAL SYMPATHY AND CIRCULATION.'

MARGARET HAVERTY AND SEAN O 'DUBHGHAILL

Correspondence: *margaret.haverty@student.uni-tuebingen.de, seanmarkodubhghaill@gmail.com*

Abstract: This paper suggests a novel research direction in 'Anthropology Ireland' in which closer attention is paid to the intensification of the desire for creature comforts among the Irish expatriate community in Germany. Physical expressions of 'care' and travel have been hampered by the structural restrictions brought about by both COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) and the departure of the UK from the European Union in Brexit. The notion that we advance is that these two crises, one a medical pandemic and the other a democratic crisis of sorts, have reshaped and reoriented Irish expatriates' relationships to 'home comforts', digital and face-to-face encounters, and have distorted perceptions of/on the future. The paper is grounded in a wealth of research obtained from Irish expatriates in Germany and was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021). This provided a unique research vantage point to examine a context in which interlocutors were adapting to the necessity for mediated electronic engagements (using video-telephony and instant messaging tools) at the same time as the researchers were. This paper contends that necessity can be birthmother to adaptation, as well as invention, necessitating the renegotiation of everyday practices for this group. This is demonstrated through a context-sensitive analysis of 'goodies'/gift-giving, sharing (both in terms of material and experience), and 'stashing' as a measure of solidarity and strength in uncertain times.

Keywords: care packages, sharing, Irish expatriates, transnational, Germany, pandemic.

Introduction

The *Corona-Verordnung* (Corona Regulations) that are in effect throughout Baden-Württemberg, the German federal state in which one of the authors is based, made field research and opportunities for participant observation in physical settings during 2020–21 made them a rare occurrence. Occasional easing in the ebb and flow of restrictions was seized upon to engage with interlocuters face-to-face. Methodological opportunism (Breidenstein et al. 2015: 34f.) became the order of the day to an even greater degree for ethnographers working in circumstances that prohibited interpersonal interactions. The necessity to shift the emphasis from physical 'co- location' to that of digital or telephonic 'co- presence' became pressing (see

Beaulieu 2010). To that end, the pandemic made it necessary for the researchers to turn away from the imperative that 'worthy' fieldwork consists solely of embodied interaction and to delve into the work of digital ethnographers (see for example Postill and Pink 2012; Pink et al. 2016; Patty Gray 2016; Hine 2017; Markham 2018; Markham and Gammelby 2017; Fleischhack 2020; and Howlett 2021). In what follows, we examine the intensification of desire in response to the pandemic at a time of year when homesickness (and the parenthetical consumerist impulse to show affection in material terms) becomes most acute for many: Christmas. We then proceed to examine the specific composition of a variety of care packages, the dual impulses to both share and 'stash' and, finally, how communication is maintained virtually in the absence of physical proximity.

The fixation with fixist registers in ethnographic enterprises might stem from the inventor of the participant observation method, a method that necessitates proximity and close interpersonal interaction. Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) and the premium he placed regarding the necessity for physical proximity for ethnographic fieldwork weighed heavily upon the researchers as contact and travel restrictions came to define the everyday. In an ironic twist of fate, many ethnographers who were starting projects had intended to leave their 'armchairs', dictaphone and notebook in hand (often for the very first time) and were, as Marnie Howlett (2021:12) identifies, instead thrust into the position of having to work from their chairs because of the pandemic. In contrast to Radcliffe-Brown's time, the 'armchair ethnographer' of today might interact with multiple participants in a Zoom call, send instant messages to an interview partner or follow the 'digital flows' (Markham and Gammelby 2017) of their social worlds through their social media activity. The new state of affairs brought about by the pandemic still required the ethnographer, as George Marcus advocated, to 'follow the people' (1995: 106), this time, however, not merely as they moved through physical space, but also into their Skype Meet Now. Turning away from the 'false dichotomy' of online and offline (Leander and McKim 2003: 212), we embraced the principle that, as Christine Hine puts it, '[i]f people do it, then that is enough to make it a legitimate focus for ethnography' (2017: 22).

During the pandemic, it was necessary to understand both that which was being studied as being in flow and for the researcher to 'go with the flow' (Markham and Gammelby 2017: 454–6), showing flexible readiness to engage with interlocuters 'wherever' they happened to be. Consequently, as interlocuters increasingly began carrying out their daily activities online, we followed suit. Digital methods became, on the one hand, both essential to overcoming the problems presented to the research by the conditions of the pandemic and, on the other hand, fundamental in following interlocuters more effectively as they increasingly occupied digital realms. New ways emerged to create co-presence and to gain insights into their everyday lives. The problems posed in the execution of fieldwork, including the necessity for in- person contact, were mirrored

by the experiences of the interlocutors who used care packages to broker the distance between 'home'[1] and abroad. These shared challenges, opportunities, and frustrations guided this project's methodological choices (Walton 2017).

In order to demonstrate the central role played by 'home' for many of the interlocuters, we might mention that the annual trip to Ireland plays a regulatory role in managing the experience of Irish expatriates. The COVID-19 pandemic and the domestic and foreign travel restrictions in Ireland and throughout Europe have meant that many have not returned to Ireland in a long time. This is a degree of spatial and social separation to which many are unaccustomed. The pandemic saw the 'territorial closure' (Löw and Knoblauch 2020: 222) of entire countries that were 'sealed off' (ibid.) from danger, similar to a *cordon sanitaire*. Many of the interlocuters in Germany live what has been termed transnational lifestyles and might, therefore, be considered transmigrants. As Glick Schiller et al. claim: 'Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns within a field of social relations that links together their country of origin and their country or countries of settlement' (1992: ix). This is not a static relationship, but rather constantly finds itself 'in-becoming' (Tedeschi et al. 2020) and this modulation is subject to both internal and external pressures. It is characterized by, among other things, a 'connectedness across borders, the formality/informality of frequent cross-border activities and practices, and the high intensity and degree of cross-border exchanges' (ibid.). Interlocuters in Germany are, to varying degrees, regular visitors to Ireland and these practices of mobility interweave their lives in Germany and in Ireland, connecting them socially, emotionally, physically, and psychologically. The absence of their annual trip home has been termed a 'safety valve' for many transmigrants living abroad by Marc Scully et al. ('Researching Transnational Families During the Pandemic' 2020), particularly for those on the continent of Europe, a place easily reachable from Ireland. Part of the benefit of residing in Europe, as opposed to one of the further flung, Anglophone poles (such as the United States, Canada, or Australia) is this exact propinquity to Ireland. This is well illustrated by Cronin and reflects a larger research lacuna into expatriates who reside closer to home and how this experience is viewed or framed as being insufficiently novel or authentic:

> *The permanent move to Canada but not the sojourn to Sicily, the emigrants' letters home from Australia, but not the visit to Berlin, become objects of critical inquiry. Irrevocability risks becoming a talisman of authenticity (real travel [exile] v. superficial travel [tourism]) and concentration on the Irish in New Communities may narrow the world to encounters with varieties of Anglophone Irishness and neglect individual Irish experiences of a multi- lingual and multicultural planet* (Cronin 2008: 185).

This closeness, or perceived closeness, became a remote reality during the pandemic and this led Irish expatriates to resort to commercial mediation and methods to demonstrate care and affection. This new, improvised economy was then threatened and upset with the UK's departure from the European Union (O' Dubhghaill 2019). In the following section, we turn our attention to 'care packages' and their recipients in the context of Christmastime during the pandemic.

Care Packages: "For both sides, that package was very meaningful"

Over the Christmas period 2020, packages from Ireland were ascribed an even greater importance by many interlocuters eagerly awaiting gifts from home. Their anticipation was, however, frequently disturbed by two factors. Firstly, December 21, 2020, saw German parcel delivery companies restrict packages to and from Ireland and the United Kingdom due to the new 'British mutation' of the Coronavirus (see *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from December 22, 2020). Secondly, the British exit from the European Union disrupted supply chains and deliveries early in 2021. These two crises interfered, once again, with the interlocuters' ability to compensate for the severance between themselves and Ireland. One interlocuter – a regular in her local post office to such an extent that she is a known personality there – was warned by a member of staff that the post office could not accept any packages to Ireland, nor could packages from Ireland be delivered to her. 'And,' she added during our telephone interview, 'we definitely saw that. I mean, even Christmas cards that were posted in Ireland on the tenth of December? And they made it to us on the second of February?'[2]

Given the restriction of physical movement to the island of Ireland from Germany, interlocuters turned instead to postal and parcel services, to *An Post* and DHL, to live out their transnational connections. This was not, however, a one-way system; interlocuters also sent packages from Germany containing local specialities like chocolate, biscuits, and soaps. Glick Schiller et al. point out that the sending of gifts is part of the efforts to maintain a transnational social field through the upholding of family ties (1992a: 4). Orla[3], who has lived abroad for over twenty years, points out that the power of the packages to overcome the distance lay not so much in their contents, but rather in the thought of the sender going to such an effort to put together and send a package, especially in the light of their incapacitation by travel restrictions. 'It's actually less the crisps, it's more the thought of their grandmother actually going and buying those crisps, and (-) packaging them, and sending them.' For Orla and her family, '*definitely* this time 'round […] for *both* sides, that package was very meaningful, very special…'[4]

Another interlocuter, Dearbhla, has lived in Germany since the mid-nineties. She is married to a German man and her two children were born there. In December 2020, she and her family faced the prospect of spending their first Christmas ever in Germany, as opposed to in Ireland. Normally, they would travel to Ireland where

her children spent many summers with their grandmother. Every Christmas Eve, they attended the same family Mass in their local parish, thereby kicking off their Christmas celebrations in Ireland. In 2020, however, the COVID-19 pandemic intervened in her German-Irish family's usual rhythms as 'for the first time in 27 years we were not in Ireland, at home – the other one – for Christmas.'[5]

On one occasion, on a glorious late- November afternoon, on a 'socially- distanced' walk through the *Weinberge* in Stuttgart, conversation with Dearbhla turned towards the approaching Christmas season. Knowing that stricter measures were in store, it was suggested that Dearbhla document her experiences of this first Christmas in Germany to share with the researchers. This move was inspired by the crowd-sourced Google document edited by Deborah Lupton (2020) designed to help social scientists with innovative suggestions for carrying out qualitative research in the restrictive situation of a pandemic. With the help of some questions to guide Dearbhla in this photo/descriptive writing elicitation, the final format was left open to her, in the clear knowledge of her creative streak and hectic professional and family schedule. With access to 'the field' (as initially understood) increasingly obstructed and obscured, 'multi-sited' ethnography (Marcus 1995) and the paradigm of 'being there . . . and there . . . and there!' (Hannerz 2003) was wholly embraced to acknowledge the interweaving of digital and analogue in everyday life. Digital technologies are fundamental to the ways in which the interlocuters interact with their social worlds every day. As Miller et al. have recently pointed out, the smartphone has become that 'ubiquitous appendage to humanity' (2021: 4).

In recognition of the complex intertwining of digital and analogue in everyday life, we engaged with research partners in digital formats and, as is the case here, handed the creative reigns to Dearbhla for this unusual Christmas. In the New Year, she shared her pdf document entitled 'Christmas Chronicles.' The document takes us from the run-up to Christmas and informing Santa that he will be delivering to Germany and not Ireland this year, to occupying time with baking and video-calls to Ireland on the couch. This pdf, illustrated with photographs, is an example of the creativity of one family adapting to the changed circumstances of their transnational lives at Christmas due to the Coronavirus pandemic. In the following extract, we gain first insight into the importance of the postal services this Christmas for maintaining transnational relationships and bonds:

> *Never have we depended on the*
> *post more than this year.*
> *Normally, it is Ryanair or*
> *Lufthansa that transports us and*

our goodies.

This year An Post and DHL took

over the role to save Christmas!

We fevered on both sides of the

Irish sea – will the packages

arrive in time? Will the faces

light up like they always do?

Everything arrived eventually

but not all on time.

Being late than never is always

better than just never!

(Dearbhla's 'Christmas Chronicles,' December 2020)

Dearbhla's 'Christmas Chronicles' were a means of gaining ethnographic access to her day-to-day experience of this unusual Christmas. Conversely, in this case, her creative document highlights the enforced immobility of herself and her family and the mobility of the parcels winging their way across geographic space, as so palpably described above. The section that follows shifts focus from how timely an individual care package arrives to someone's door to focus on whether or not different consumables can be sourced on site.

Intensified Desire for 'Home Comforts'

There has been a noticeable turn towards objects and food items to create a sense of 'coming home', given that many are no longer in a position to travel. One interlocuter frequents the local 'English Shop' in Stuttgart to purchase some familiar items found in the cupboard he remembers from his childhood, reasoning 'when you're away from home those things […] especially now in a pandemic […] those kinda things give you a bit of a home comfort feel'[6]. This shop, due to Brexit and difficulties getting their usual stock from the UK, have turned to Irish suppliers and begun to stock Irish favourites such as Tayto crisps and Barry's Tea; the word of 'restocks' spreads in the interlocuters' circles on social media and in messaging groups. This information is passed on to others in order that those in similar situations might avail of the familiar products to ameliorate the sense of isolation. One interlocuter immediately reached out to two fellow residents of Stuttgart hailing from her home county to inform them of the sudden and unexpected availability of Hunky Dory's in the *Schellingstraße*[7].

In the case of Belgium, stock shortages in a small specialty store outside of Brussels somewhat inexplicably became national news in Ireland, a little over a month after Brexit came into effect. The Irish Independent

published an article detailing the difficulties faced by an English specialty store, the Stone Manor near Brussels, in stocking their shelves, resorting to importing from Ireland rather than from the UK. The piece[8] outlines the manner in which this specialty store is increasingly gravitating towards Irish suppliers, rather than suppliers based in the UK. High-value consumables, including HP sauce, are singled out in the article as now being sourced from suppliers in Sweden. Indeed, there are some who would go to any length for this condiment, even though this remains a stopgap commodity for others; the more highly prized Ireland-based Y. R. Sauce is what is more commonly sought, and this was observed during the ethnographic project.

One interlocuter spoke on the phone about his favourite Irish food product, Y. R. Sauce. For Dónal, this 'exclusively Irish'[9] product has a fruitier taste than the other well- known brand of Yorkshire relish available in Germany and Belgium, H.P. Although Dónal has, in the past, made do with this less-than-ideal replacement, he does so somewhat reluctantly: 'If you're halfway through a bottle of H. P. sauce, you think, it's every bit as good. Then you get a bottle of Y. R. and you think, "No, this is better."'[10] In May 2020, Dónal knew that he would have to go for some time without this item, given that he would not be receiving Irish visitors during the summer. Moreover, it might not be even possible to take the alternative in many cases, given its shortage too. Dónal wrote in February 2021 to inform the researcher that, with his relatives still 'in lockdown' in Ireland, he had to order his own 'care package,' sharing an image of the coveted Y.R. sauce.[11] We argue that while care packages are commonly sent from one person to another, a 'self-care' package, which contains both a taste of home and prevents a person from having to accept a substitute, reinforces the connection with home. In the following section, we shift the examination somewhat to a consideration of shared commodities that are shared during (brief) in-person encounters.

Sharing and Stashing

> *[Conn] proudly presents to me a Wright's of Howth bag from Dublin airport and he pulls out a giant bar of Dairy Milk, a smaller bar of Dairy Milk with Oreo filling and a bag of Tayto. He tells me it took all of his will power not to eat these items but promising them to me helped him to keep his temptation at bay. He tells me to hang on to the bag, as it is a lovely one, to remind me of home, and I can use it to transport my materials to the Ciorcal Comhrá when it starts up again.* Research diary entry from January 25, 2021.

Some interlocuters managed to return to Ireland for Christmas. Conn, a young professional with no family in Germany, undertook the trip to Ireland to visit his family over Christmas – sharing with one of the authors an image of a ghostly terminal one arrivals in Dublin airport on December 18, the Friday before Christmas.[12] Upon his return, he presented this same author with this gift, admitting that it was somewhat rushed, given

that he had to leave Ireland earlier than originally planned due to the tightening of measures in Germany. Conn is not the only interlocuter who, having made it to Ireland, wished to share the spoils of a completed roundtrip. Aoife wrote on January 4, 2021, to ask if one author had 'any wishes from Ireland' before she returned to Germany[13]. Aoife had previously surprised the Germany- based researcher who joined her for a walk on a blustery, cold November day in Stuttgart – hands freezing cold, both walkers underdressed for the weather[14]. Upon taking leave of each other, Aoife calls the researcher back. From the compartment underneath the buggy, she produces a small plastic sandwich bag packed full of Tayto, assorted Cadbury's Roses, and Double Deckers and hands the gift over. Just as the information about the availability of Tayto and Y.R. Sauce in the Stuttgart English shop is shared throughout the relevant channels in Stuttgart and elsewhere, so too is the access to Irish products by those who returned to the island for Christmas with those who were unable to travel. These gifts are thoughtful tokens meant not only to bring joy as a comestible, but to sympathize with a transmigrant who was unable to travel, to know that they were being thought about and that their hardship was not forgotten. Giving gifts to close the distance between country of origin and abroad is a topic discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

The scarcity of these goods in pandemic Germany and Belgium is reflected in the practice of stashing. In 2020, the All-Ireland Football Final took place in the run-up to Christmas, itself a jarring experience for GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) fans. In a rare face-to-face encounter, one researcher was invited by an interlocuter to join her and her family for the event. On December 12, 2020, a curfew came into effect in Baden-Württemberg and I was uneasy about whether I would make it back to my apartment before the eight-p.m. curfew. As a gift, I brought, amongst other items, three bags of Tayto crisps, my last, to give to Aifric who missed her family in Ireland greatly. Her children swooped down on, and then devoured, two of the packets of crisps, leaving just one. Realising this, she stashed this final packet in a small compartment in her living room coffee table. When it came time to leave, and after establishing that I would be able to continue to follow the match on a live ticker, Aifric waved goodbye from her couch and her husband and children saw me out with a jovial '*slán*.' Dublin eventually won the game and Aifric wrote later that evening, after I commiserated with her on her team's loss, remarking: 'I have a pack of Tayto to drown my sorrows!!!!'

The same interlocuter, who had not seen her family in Ireland since the Christmas period 2019, told me as she folded the washing during our telephone interview in May 2021, that in the past, she would often distribute the spoils of a trip to Ireland, wanting to '*share* what is home'[15] with friends in Germany unfamiliar with Ireland or Irish products. Now, she admits, to being more 'protective'[16] of the precious items that made it to her by post, 'because they've become much harder to get.'[17] Although she would share her Irish goodies with other Irish people in the locality, whom she could rely on to 'appreciate those things,'[18] she no longer

feels the need to share these special treats with those who may enjoy the taste on the surface, but not necessarily appreciate the full meaning of having access to these items so rare in Germany and, therefore, so laden with ascribed connotations of home. No longer able to 'come and go'[19] from Ireland as before, these coveted items are in this case ascribed a particular worth only appreciated by those initiated into what are understood to be 'Irish' consumption practices. In what follows, we turn our gaze to the context of the pandemic and to the everyday adaptive practices that were brought into existence by the changes to the interlocutors' international mobility over the Christmas period.

'Making it all more bearable': Adapting[20]

> It was clear on so many fronts, extra catch-up calls, Whatsapp crisis therapy, alcoholic shots in the dark, it was all there. Whether at home or at home, everyone felt the gap and filled it as best as they could.
>
> Dearbhla's 'Christmas Chronicles,' December 2020

Christmas became a trying period for the Irish expatriates who were coming to terms with the fact that they could not return to Ireland and could not foresee when this situation might change. There was a great deal of powerlessness as well as a will to adapt creatively tangible in conversations surrounding travel restrictions over the Christmas period. In our interview in November 2020, Dearbhla stated that 'there are times when I'm on my own and I think about it and it makes me terribly, terribly sad. Like I know the reality of me saying I've never spent one Christmas in Germany. I will get through it, but I don't want to have to.'[21] As is the case for many others, improvisation and adaptation become a strategic necessity to navigate the insecurity and powerlessness brought by the global pandemic and manifested itself in the simplest of daily considerations, such as where one will attend Mass and where, in a country in which turkey is not traditionally consumed at Christmas, to source such a thing for Christmas dinner.

The order of their lives prior to the pandemic, where affordable and reliable air travel connections made regular visits to their country of origin possible, has been disrupted and finds itself under threat (see Frie and Nieswand 2017; see also Frie, Kohl and Meier 2018). The strong, negative impact of the pandemic on the movement of people and goods must first be interpreted and integrated into their daily lives and practices. This plays out on the level of how to make the best out of Christmas in Germany and adapt to the use of digital technologies to stay in touch with their social contacts in Ireland. As is clear from Dearbhla's statement, her expectations about the future vacillate and she can no longer rely on the habitual practices involved in returning to Ireland for Christmas. Moreover, with interruptions in trade, even a guaranteed method to broker a way to bridge the gap through consumerist fare is jeopardized, leading to a greater

feeling of sub- optimality. Threatened orders are characterized by the fact that actors can no longer be sure if they can rely on their expectations (ibid.: 6, author's translation). According to Frie and Nieswand (2017), these are moments when new scripts of action ('*neue Handlungsskripte*'; ibid.) are developed so that actors may come to terms with the changed situation they find themselves in. The interlocuters that they find, as well as the researcher, are in the process of interpreting the events in order to find possibilities of action under conditions that appear particularly uncertain and unforeseeable. In that way, both the ethnographer and the people with whom they explore the social field find themselves constantly realigning expectations and recalibrating modes of action. One of the biggest and most obvious manners in which disruptions have taken place in response to the pandemic is in terms of how communication takes place and this is examined in the following section.

Mediated electronic engagements: Establishing 'the connection 'now and in the future

The pandemic has necessitated an increase in the use of digital tools in order to interact with social contacts on the island of Ireland. During the late spring, early summer of 2020, the embargo on shared encounters with other human beings in physical space was compensated by the intensification and higher frequency of digital connections, as Cara described during our Skype call in May 2020:

> *'cos everybody is kind of remotely based now, they need the connection, or feel they need the connection […] I find it's the same with family. […] there's more (--) we would have always had a WhatsApp group, […] even for our family, but it would […] always have been just texting […]. Whereas now, we use it for calls and we use it for video calls and we use Houseparty? We have a family Houseparty call? […] on Sunday afternoon, so everybody dials in for half an hour or an hour, and, you know, you've got (-) five different families of people, all grouped together, and they're all on this call at the same time […] and everybody loves it, you know? It's great, great.*
> Skype interview with   Cara, May 22, 2020, lines 153–163.

Cara describes how the increased use of videotelephony in familial communication has meant a greater degree of contact between herself and her parents and siblings than before the pandemic. Enthusiasm for this new mode of communication is palpable in our conversation and she tells me about this during our Skype session, sipping from an Ireland mug and speaking into her professional-looking headset. Family quizzes and other interactive games or activities become part of standard modes of communication. However, this can often prove difficult, given the pandemic's overbearing presence. Fionnuala, a woman who lives with her German husband in Munich, drew our attention to this. Fionnuala and her family created their mother's kitchen table in an online setting, thereby gently steering conversation away from the Corona-shaped

elephant in the room. On one occasion, each sibling and their families baked an apple pie and sent pictures to their mother who judged the best submission. The family then enjoyed tea or coffee with a slice of their pies, Fionnuala 'dialled in' from Bavaria, other siblings from the UK, the USA, and other locations in Ireland. It was a positive experience for her to 'have that connection'[22] despite the pandemic preventing her from her (normally quite regular) visits to Ireland. Videotelephony provided her and her family with an opportunity to have 'a virtual (-) Sunday afternoon with [Mum][23].' This 'densification of digital networking processes' (Löw and Knoblauch 2020: 222) and the creativity that informs participants' use of them contrasts sharply with the spatial closing of territories and countries (ibid.: 223), even as new avenues of digital interaction are being opened up to more traffic. The tension between 'delimitation' of digital communication and 'limitation' (ibid.: 222) of physical interaction and traversing of geographical space is exemplified in the case of the virtual tea and cake with Mum. Abrupt and prolonged physical immobility and heightened digital mobility has led to such creative engagements with communication technologies. The pandemic, as a territorially 'unbounded' (ibid.: 222) phenomenon with real repercussions in the daily lives of the interlocuters living transnational lives to look into the future with a sense of uncertainty. This will be examined in the following section.

Uncertain perceptions of the future

> My head doesn't get around the fact that [Dearbhla] can't decide. It's not in my hands. It's always been in my hands […] and that's what has probably made life here so easy for me, is because I always said 'I can go.' If it was America, I think it would probably be a bit different […] but ((inhales)) I remember my Dad saying to me, 'you don't need to emigrate.' I've <u>never</u> considered myself as an emigrant. […] people emigrated and never went back home. I just moved somewhere else. I sometimes see my Mum more often than my sister who lives in [Ireland].
>
> Interview with Dearbhla, May 29, 2020, lines 207–216.

Many transmigrants in Germany and Belgium travel to and from Ireland and this plays a large role in their practice of Irishness when they are both away from and staying in Ireland. By returning occasionally or frequently to Ireland, they can renew their social and interpersonal relationships, as well as revivify their relationship to their country of origin. The pandemic and the ensuing travel restrictions have removed one of the most fundamental elements of their transnational lives. As Dearbhla so elegantly put it in May 2020 during our first face-to-face encounter, sitting on an orange canvas stool in the driveway she had converted into an outdoor oasis during the strict '*Kontaktverbot*' of the first lockdown, it is the removal of this ability to return easily - that 'I can go'-feeling - that leads to a level of uncertainty and a state of liminality hitherto entirely unfamiliar to her and her German-Irish family.

In contrast to those who have left Ireland to lead lives in further flung locations, such as Australia or America, Dearbhla points out that the move to Germany is not as dramatic an embarkation in the minds of those living on the European continent. The availability of cheap, regular flights to Ireland characterized the attitudes towards those migrants who have been termed in the media the 'Ryanair Generation', and those who took advantage of advances in information and communications technology, the 'Skype Generation.'[24] The matter-of-course to-ing and fro-ing from between Germany/Belgium and Ireland for everything from Christmas to Confirmations vanished overnight and has not reliably returned at the point of writing. The topography of Ireland as an island cut off from the continent by a body of water is foregrounded by the unavailability of flights as, at Christmas, one interlocuter describes how his Italian friend can simply jump in a car and overcome the distance with a greater degree of agency. This group, on the other hand, rely on airlines (or on other occasions, ferry companies) to broker a physical connection to the island. Many deliberations have been prompted for a further interlocuter by the restrictions on travel experienced during 2020-2021, despite her having lived in Germany for almost twenty years:

> *I suppose in a way the pandemic has kind of […] shaken up our connection with Ireland, maybe, and with Germany as well? […] I think it's exposed this something we hadn't really dealt with or come to the fore before. For me. Personally. It's been a bit of a journey to understand, where am I now, in relation to Germany and in relation to Ireland.*

Conclusions

Travelling regularly to Ireland from Germany was, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the ensuing restrictions on international travel, one way in which the Irish research collaborators living in Germany maintained their connections to Ireland whilst living their daily lives in Germany. In the absence of their regular visits, gift-giving, sending, and receiving care packages, sharing, and stashing goodies, and the imaginative and resourceful use of digital tools stepped in to ameliorate their feeling of isolation from the island of Ireland and their social contacts there, thereby maintaining their transnational social field. These practices were used as a means of coming to terms with and renegotiating their everyday lives with an eye to uncertain perceptions of the future in the threatened orders brought about by the pandemic, the travel restrictions, and Brexit. As the restrictions brought a reassessment of the methods, the ethnographers began to realize that flexibility was required to 'follow the people' as they adapted to and learned to get by with the new challenges and uncertain future of their connection to Ireland. Much of the flowing through digital and analogue socialscapes carried out by the researchers was a reaction to the reality of the way interlocuters were forced to live out their transnational lives in a European Union with severely decreased freedom of movement.

References

Beaulieu, A., 2010. "Research Note: From Co-Location to Co-Presence: Shifts in the Use of Ethnography for the Study of Knowledge." *Soc Stud Sci* 40 (3), 453–70.

Breidenstein, G., S. Hirschauer, H. Kalthoff, and B. Nieswand., 2015. *Ethnografie: Die Praxis Der Feldforschung.* 2nd ed. Constance: UVK-Verl.-Ges.

Central Statistics Office, 2021. "Aviation Statistics Quarter 4 and Year 2020: CSO Statistical Release, 14 April 2021, 11am." Accessed May 11, 2021. https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesand publications/er/as/aviationstatistics quarter4andyear2020/.

Collins, S., 2021. "'Ireland Is Fairly Reliable': Speciality Shops in EU Switch to Irish Suppliers." *Irish Independent*, February 10, 2021. https://www.independent.ie/busine ss/brexit/ireland-is-fairly-reliable-speciality-shops-in-eu-switch-to- irish-suppliers-40076074.html.

Cronin M., 2008. "Minding Ourselves: A New Face for Irish Studies." *Field Day Review* 4, 174–85. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25469 729.

dpa, 2020. "Deutsche Post Nimmt Keine Pakete Nach Großbritannien Mehr an." *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 22, 2020. https://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirt schaft/verbraucher-deutsche-post- nimmt-keine-pakete-nach- grossbritannien-mehr-an-dpa.urn- newsml-dpa-com-20090101- 201222-99-783618.

dpa, 2020. "Wegen Der Mutation Des Corona-Virus Können Auch Pakete Nicht Mehr Nach Großbritannien Geliefert Werden."*Business Insider,* December 21, 2020. https://www.businessinsider.de/wir tschaft/dhl-paketlieferungen-nach- grossbritannien-sind- unterbrochen/.

Dublin Airport, 2020. "Dublin Airport Christmas Passenger Numbers down by 88%." December 11, 2020. Accessed May 6, 2021. https://www.dublinairport.com/late st-news/2020/12/11/dublin-airport- christmas-passenger-numbers- down-by-88.

Fleischhack, J., 2020. "Ethnografisch (Um)Denken", in J. Klingner and M. Lühr (eds.), *Forschungsdesign 4.0: Datengenerierung Und Wissenstransfer in Interdisziplinärer Perspektive*. ISGV digital 1. Dresden: Institut für

Sächsische Geschichte und Volkskunde; Sächsische Landesbibliothek - Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden. 94–106.

Frie, E. and B. Nieswand, 2017. "«Bedrohte Ordnungen» Als Thema Der Kulturwissenschaften: Zwölf Thesen Zur Begründung Eines Forschungsbereiches." *Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift für moderne europäische Geschichte / Revue d'histoire européenne contemporaine* 15 (1), 5–35.

Frie, E., T. Kohl, and M. Meier, 2018. "Dynamics of Social Change and Perceptions of Threat: An Introduction", in idem. (eds.), *Dynamics of Social Change and Perceptions of Threat*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. 1–9.

Glick Schiller, N., L. Basch, and C. Blanc-Szanton, 1992. "Towards a Definition of Transnationalism. Introductory Remarks and Research Questions." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 645, ix–xiv. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749- 6632.1992.tb33482.x.

Glick Schiller, N., L. Basch, and C. Blanc-Szanton, 1992a. "Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 645, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749- 6632.1992.tb33484.x.

Gray, B., 2013. "'Generation Emigration': The Politics of (Trans)National Social Reproduction in Twenty-First-Century Ireland." *Irish Studies Review* 21 (1), 20–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882. 2012.759707.

Gray, P. A., 2016. "Memory, Body, and the Online Researcher: Following Russian Street Demonstrations via Social Media." *American Ethnologist* 43 (3), 500–510.

Hannerz, U., 2003. "Being There… And There… And There!". *Ethnography* 4 (2), 201–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/146613810 30042003.

Hine, C., 2017. "From Virtual Ethnography to the Embedded, Embodied, Everyday Internet," in L. Hjorth, H. Horst, A. Galloway, and G. Bell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*. New York: Routledge. 21–28.

Howlett, M., 2021. "Looking at the 'Field' Through a Zoom Lens: Methodological Reflections on Conducting Online Research During a Global Pandemic." *Qualitative Research* January 2021, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/146879412 0985691.

Irish in Britain, 2020. "Researching Transnational Families During the Pandemic: An Interview with Dr Sara Hannafin, Dr Niamh McNamara and Dr Marc Scully." Accessed April 9, 2021. https://www.irishinbritain.org/news/researching-transnational-families- during-the-pandemic.

Leander, K. M., and K. K. McKim, 2003. "Tracing the Everyday 'Sitings' of Adolescents on the Internet: A Strategic Adaptation of Ethnography Across Online and Offline Spaces." *Education, Communication & Information* 3 (2), 211–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/146363103 03140.

Löw, M., and H. Knoblauch, 2020. "Dancing in Quarantine: The Spatial Refiguration of Society and the Interaction Orders." *Space and Culture* 23 (3), 221–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/120633122 0938627.
Lupton, D. (ed.), 2020. "Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic: Crowd- Sourced Document." Accessed April 9, 2021. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1clGjGABB2h2qbduTgfqribHmog 9B6P0NvMgVuiHZCl8/edit?ts=5e88a e0a#.

Malinowski, B., and J. G. Frazer, 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea.* London: G. Routledge & Sons, Ltd.

Marcus, G. E., 1995. "Ethnography In/of the World System Vol. 24, 1995,: The Emergence of Multi- Sited Ethnography."*Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, 95–117. www.jstor.org/stable/2155931. Accessed April 7, 2021.

Markham, A. N., 2018. "Ethnography in the Digital Internet Era: From Fields to Flows, Descriptions to Interventions," in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.* 5th ed. Los Angeles, California: SAGE Publications. 650–69.

Markham, A. N., and A. K. Gammelby, 2017. "Moving Through Digital Flows: An Epistemological and Practical Approach," in U. Flick (ed), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, 1st ed. Los Angeles: Sage. 451–65.

Miller, D., L. A. Rabho, P. Awondo, M. de Vries, M. Duque, P. Garvey, L. Haapio-Kirk et al., 2021. *Global Smartphone: Beyond a Youth Technology.* Ageing with smartphones. London: UCL PRESS.

O' Dubhghaill, S., 2019. *An Anthropology of the Irish in Belgium: Belonging, Identity and Community in Europe.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pink, S., H. A. Horst, J. Postill, L. Hjorth, T. Lewis, and J. Tacchi, 2016. *Digital ethnography. Principles and practice.* Los Angeles, CA, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage.

Postill, J., and S. Pink, 2012. "Social Media Ethnography: The Digital Researcher in a Messy Web", *Media International Australia,* 145(1), 123–134. DOI: 10.1177/1329878X1214500114.

Scully, M., 2020. "How Will the 'Ryanair Generation' of Emigrants Fare Post-Covid?" *The Irish Times*, July 13, 2020. https://www.irishtimes.com/life- and-style/abroad/how-will-the- ryanair-generation-of-emigrants-fare-post-covid-1.4301379.

Tedeschi, M., E. Vorobeva, and J. S. Jauhiainen, 2020. "Transnationalism: Current Debates and New Perspectives." *GeoJournal.* https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708- 020-10271-8.

Walton, S., 2017. "Being There Where? Designing Digital-Visual Methods for Moving With/in Iran," in A. Elliot, R. Norum, and N. B. Salazar (eds.), *Methodologies of Mobility: Ethnography and Experiment*. Worlds in motion 2. New York: Berghahn Books. 148–71.

Wilson, Thomas M., and H. Donnan., 2006. *The Anthropology of Ireland.* Oxford, New York: Berg[25].

---

[1] The concept of 'home' is used frequently throughout this article as it is a term which we encounter time and time again in the field. However, it is a fluid and at times ambiguous concept, changing flexibly depending on the context. 'Home' is used to refer to the place they are from in Ireland, to their residence in Germany, they 'go home' in both directions, to Ireland and to Germany. This ambiguity of the concept gains another layer with the increasing use of digital technologies to maintain personal ties with social circles and to reinforce imaginings of the home in Ireland. Miller et al (2021) discuss the smartphone as the 'Transportal Home' as well as 'a place within which we now live' (219). Significantly, migrants already encounter daily 'the limitations of the traditional concept of home as a single physical location, which would separate them from much of their family and their sociocultural upbringing' (220).

[2] Telephone interview with Orla, March 31, 2021

[3] All research participants have been assigned pseudonyms to afford them anonymity.

[4] Telephone interview with Orla, March 31, 2021

[5] Dearbhla's 'Christmas Chronicles,' December 2020.

[6] Signal voice message elicited on March 15, 2021

[7] Telephone interview with Orla, March 31, 2021

[8] "'Ireland is fairly reliable' – speciality shops in EU switch to Irish suppliers" from the Irish Independent on February 21, 2021.

[9] Telephone interview with Dónal, May 06, 2020

[10] Telephone interview with Dónal,

[11] Dónal shares this information via Telegram messenger, February 4, 2021

[12] Dublin airport saw 1.2 million passengers pass through during the Christmas period 2019. For the same period in 2020, the airport predicted 137,000 passengers would pass through, 10,000 of those for connecting flights. ('Dublin Airport Christmas Passenger Numbers Down by 88%' 2020). In the fourth quarter of 2019, 8,540,952 persons passed through Irish airports. In the same quarter in 2020, they numbered 759,015, a staggering drop of 91.1 percent ('Aviation Statistics Quarter 4 and Year 2020').

[13] Research diary entry from January 7, 2021, regarding message received via WhatsApp on January 4, 2021.

[14] Research diary entry from November 23, 2020

[15] Telephone interview with Aifric, May 3, 2021

[16] Ibid

[17] Ibid

[18] Ibid

[19] Ibid

[20] This is the title of one page from Dearbhla's 'Christmas Chronicles' which describes the ways they attempted to keep their minds off not travelling to Ireland at Christmas by creating their own culinary treats to have a mini-Christmas-market at home. This creativity was "a real necessity to master our normal now."

[21] Interview with Dearbhla in Stuttgart, November 13, 2020

[22] Telephone interview with Fionnuala, May 12, 20

[23] Ibid.

[24] For a discussion on these terms as well as that of the 'Generation Emigration' section of the Irish Times, see Gray 2013