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EDITORIAL NOTE

ANTHROPOLOGY IN AND FROM IRELAND

Since its foundation, the Irish Journal of Anthropology has held together two commitments that do not always sit comfortably in a single publication: the anthropology of Ireland, and anthropology done from Ireland and carried outward into the wider discipline. This issue embodies both. The four articles in this regular issue take Irish social worlds as their point of departure, moving from a decade of student fieldwork in rural Roscommon, to the front rooms of Irish households opened to Ukrainian refugees, across the Atlantic to the invention of Irish-American ethnicity, to a Kerry dance tradition. In addition, the nine book reviews follow Irish-based anthropologists and their students into Belfast bars and Dublin's drug economy, but also out to the river deltas of Myanmar and Senegal, the potato highlands of Peru, the market stalls of Mongolia, and the healthcare and business worlds of Denmark. This is a general issue rather than a themed one, and readers should not expect a single argument to run through it. Even so, the contributions prove unexpectedly companionable, and it is worth pausing over what they share before we introduce them in turn.

If there is a common thread, it is a concern, pursued in registers that run from the intimate to the institutional, with how people make, lose, and remake the things they treat as given: home, tradition, identity, value, and belonging. Each is shown to be actively under pressure from forces that reach well beyond the local, among them migration and displacement, war, globalisation, economic crisis, changing technology, and the slow grind of policy. Before turning to the contributions, we want to sketch this shared preoccupation a little further.

Making, Unmaking and Remaking

The vocabulary of making and remaking recurs across this issue, and it is worth dwelling on. In her contribution, Emma Rice borrows Baxter and Brickell's (2014) notion of home unmaking to describe how a household can be quietly divested of its familiar fabric, and she shows that unmaking and remaking often proceed together rather than in sequence. A similar doubleness runs through the other articles. A dance tradition is conserved by being reworked; a rural community sustains itself by adapting; an ethnic identity is defended by being reinvented. What looks from the outside like loss, decline, or assimilation frequently turns out, on closer ethnographic inspection, to be a process of active reconstruction.

This is a familiar move in the anthropology of ethnicity and tradition. Fredrik Barth (1969) taught us to see ethnic groups as relational and boundary-made rather than simply given, and Werner Sollors (1989) to treat ethnicity as invention rather than inheritance. Several of the contributions here extend that insight into fresh settings, whether the setting is a Kerry stage, a Roscommon parish, an Irish sitting room, or a park in Virginia. The reviews carry the same sensibility abroad, attending to how memory,

value, resistance, and materiality are worked and reworked in communities far from Ireland. Taken together, the issue offers a snapshot of a discipline that is attentive to both continuity and change, and comfortable moving between the ethnographic close-up and the global frame.

Our contributors trace these processes across a range of settings: the rural livelihoods, migrations, and cultural expressions that a decade of student fieldwork has documented in County Roscommon (Rasch and colleagues); the Irish households remade, both materially and emotionally, by the arrival of Ukrainian refugees (Rice); and the invention of Irish-American ethnicity in the controversy over a renamed park in Virginia (Artz); the North Kerry step dancing that Siamsa Tíre has conserved and reworked across half a century (Kearney). The nine reviews that follow extend these concerns outward, from Dublin's drug economy and Belfast's rebel music to ecological loss, cashlessness, hierarchy, technology, and the moral work of the discipline itself.

Overview of Contributions

The issue opens with the widest lens. Elisabet Dueholm Rasch and her co-authors draw on 251 research reports written over ten years by Dutch undergraduates who spent two weeks of fieldwork in County Roscommon as part of a field-methods course at Wageningen University. Reading these 'mini-ethnographies' in aggregate, they identify five recurring themes, namely farmers and turf cutters, migration, community organisation, pub life, and expressions of Irish culture, that map closely onto the classic preoccupations of Irish anthropology. The result is a portrait of rural Roscommon as at once vulnerable and resilient: farm livelihoods sustained by off-farm work and EU subsidies and defended as a way of life rather than a balance sheet; the out-migration of the young set against the arrival of Brazilian, Eastern European, and refugee newcomers; and pubs as well as Tidy Towns committees as fragile but vital sites of belonging. Candid about what a fortnight's fieldwork can and cannot capture, including the risk of reproducing stereotypes of 'Irishness', the article also, quietly, reflects on how ethnographic knowledge is made in the first place.

From this county-wide panorama, the issue turns to Emma Rice's vision of the Irish home placed under sudden pressure. Drawing on ethnography with sixteen Irish hosts affiliated with the Helping Irish Hosts network, Rice examines what happens to a household when it takes in Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russia's 2022 invasion. Borrowing Baxter and Brickell's notion of home unmaking, she shows how the arrival of traumatised guests can quietly dismantle the material and imaginative fabric of the home, so that rooms become off-limits, routines are policed, the news of a distant war seeps in through a guest's video calls, and hosts come to feel like visitors in their own houses. Yet unmaking is only half of the story. The same arrangements generate acts of homemaking and remaking, from shared meals of borscht and shepherd's pie, to Ukrainian decorations on Irish mantelpieces, to kinship-like bonds that turn a lonely house into a fuller one. Rice's achievement is to hold these together, presenting hospitality as a deeply ambivalent process in which disruption and renewal are entangled rather than opposed.

The issue then addresses questions of belonging across the Atlantic and into the politics of ethnicity. Kendall Artz reconstructs the controversy that erupted in 2018 when the city of Alexandria, Virginia, quietly stripped the name of the Irish-born Revolutionary War hero John Fitzgerald from a local park, and the Ancient Order of Hibernians mobilised to defend it. Reading the episode through Barth, Sollors, and the idea of ethnicity as invention, Artz argues that Irish-American identity is not a fading residue of the old country but an actively constructed and thoroughly political achievement, one that fuses Irishness with Catholicism, whiteness, masculinity, and a narrative of historical victimhood. The battle over a park sign becomes a site where the boundaries of an ethnic group are redrawn, and where the awkward matter of Fitzgerald's slaveholding past is reframed as one more attack on the perennially persecuted Irish. The piece is a sharp reminder that ethnicity, far from being inherited and passive, is made and remade in the present, and that the work of remembering is itself a kind of creation.

The final article in this volume intensively cultivates tradition. Writing as both scholar and participant, Daithí Kearney traces the North Kerry step-dancing style associated with the dancing master Jeremiah 'Munnix' Molyneaux as it has been carried, staged, and transformed by Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland. Through archival research, ethnography, and a striking use of his own ethnographic poetry, he follows a single set dance, 'The Blackbird', across productions from the 1970s to the present, using it to think about the relationship between tradition and innovation, commerce and community, the archive and the living body. The company's dependence on cultural tourism, and the long shadow of Riverdance, might suggest a tradition frozen for the market. Kearney shows instead a repertoire that repeatedly returns to its sources to move forward, so that dance becomes an embodied text and a bond linking performers across generations.

The nine reviews that follow extend these questions into the wider field, and the first two speak directly back to the Irish material. Alina Bezljaj reviews Brendan Marsh's *The Logic of Violence: An Ethnography of Dublin's Illegal Drug Trade*, a vivid first-person account of a world usually closed to researchers, and asks whether an analysis that locates violence largely in individual disposition can capture the wider structural forces that surround it. Sinéad Lynch reviews Stephen Millar's *Sounding Dissent: Rebel Songs, Resistance, and Irish Republicanism*, a study of Belfast's rebel-music scene and of the ways in which song binds past and present in republican memory, and one that resonates closely with Kearney's account of embodied continuity.

A second cluster takes up memory, ecology, and the passage of time. Katlyne Armstrong reviews Olivia Angé and David Berliner's *Ecological Nostalgias*, a collection on how communities from Greenland to the Peruvian Andes mourn and respond to environmental loss, and on the double edge of nostalgia as both critique and quiet imperialism. Bhargabi Das reviews *Delta Life*, Franz Krause and Mark Harris's anthology on the volatile, amphibious worlds where rivers meet the sea, drawing out its arguments about hydrosociality, waiting, and a relational sense of time that refuses the rhythms of capitalist modernity.

Both books, like several of this issue's articles, are preoccupied with how people dwell within change they cannot control.

A third grouping turns to money, value, and power. Devon Gidley gives an account of the uneven consequences of the global drift toward cashlessness for the marginalised populations who feel it most sharply. Zach Roche revisits hierarchy not as something to be dismissed but as a moral order to be understood, and which closes with David Graeber's reflections on the history of the term. Stuart Lang reviews communications technology and social change in China framed through the idea of permanent liminality, which cautions against the Western assumption that technological progress must deliver democratisation.

The final two reviews turn a reflexive eye on the discipline itself. Ellen A. Ahlness reviews *The Moral Work of Anthropology*, edited by Hanne Overgaard Mogensen and Birgitte Gorm Hansen, a Danish-rooted collection that asks why anthropologists are so preoccupied with their moral commitments and so reluctant to name their own power. In a second contribution, Devon Gidley reviews Michael Kilman and Kate Wellstrom's *Build Better Worlds*, an unusual primer that teaches anthropological thinking to novelists, game designers, and filmmakers, and a reminder that the discipline's core insight, that culture is made rather than found, has a reach well beyond the seminar room.

No single argument binds these thirteen contributions, and none is intended to. What they offer instead is a portrait of contemporary anthropology as practised in and from Ireland: rooted in careful ethnography, alert to memory and materiality, and unafraid to ask how the things we take to be most settled, whether home, tradition, ethnicity, or value, are in fact continually made and remade. We thank the authors for their work, the reviewers for their generous and careful engagement with recent scholarship, and all those whose labour has made this issue possible. It is a pleasure to commend it to our readers.

Conclusion and note about this issue

This issue is the first regular issue during my tenure as editor-in-chief. After taking over from my predecessor, Kayla Rush, to whom I remain grateful for the foundation she laid, it was my privilege to see through the completion and online publication of two special issues. Some of the materials gathered here were originally prepared for a 2022 volume that, in the event, we were unable to publish, due to both personal events and editorial transition issues. Rather than issue it under a long-past date, a decision was made to add to this issue and publish it together here, so that each contribution appears with an accurate and current date as part of this 2026 volume. I am grateful to all our authors for their patience and delighted to see their work publicly available at last.

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TIDY TOWNS, GAELIC FOOTBALL AND TURF CUTTERS: YIELDING INSIGHTS FROM TEN YEARS OF STUDENT RESEARCH ON RURAL LIFE IN COUNTY ROSCOMMON

BY ELISABET DUEHOLM RASCH, RENÉE BEUNE, GIJS CREMERS, LOTJE DE VRIES, PIA FERNER, SARAH HUNT, MINDI SCHNEIDER, LUCIE SOVOVA, CASPAR SWINKELS, FLOOR VAN DER HOUT, CHANTAL WIECKARDT AND KAREN VAN ZAAL

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Abstract: Drawing on 251 research reports written by Dutch bachelor's students as part of a field methods training that includes two weeks of fieldwork in County Roscommon, this article explores how students encounter and study “rural life” during their fieldwork, what key themes emerge from their reports and what these themes tell us about Irish rural life over the last ten years. It discusses the five core themes that emerged from the reports: rural livelihoods, migration, community organizations, pub life and Gaelic cultural expressions, often framed within national and international economic and political developments and policies.

Keywords: student ethnography, Ireland, rural life, fieldwork, teaching field methods.

Arriving

The hustle and bustle turns silent as soon as the bus driver announces his final exit towards the Kilbride Community Centre (Roscommon County)—a white-coloured building surrounded by abundant parking space, halfway between Roscommon town and Tulsk. Inside, a spirited welcome committee of curious host families and representatives of Roscommon LEADER awaits the arrival of this year's batch of Dutch students. These students have come to embark on field research about “rural life” in the region. With shy postures, sweaty hands, and growing anticipation, students make their way into the Centre, meet their host families, say goodbye to their classmates and supervisors, and make the final approach to becoming fieldworkers. From this point onward, they will spend two weeks immersed in and talking with people in Roscommon.

This trip to Roscommon is part of the Field Research Practical, a methods course in which students learn to apply field research methods. The Field Research Practical is an obligatory part of the BSc program in International Development Studies at Wageningen University (the Netherlands) and takes place at the end of the second study year (Rasch et al. 2020). As course supervisors, we, the authors of this article, have all been on board that bus to Kilbride. We have helped students craft their individual research proposals in the first week of the course in Wageningen, accompanied them to Roscommon to offer

fieldwork guidance through their field research, and facilitated data analysis and report writing in the last week of the course.

In this article we reflect on 251 student projects that were realized within the context of this course over the past ten years. The large number and longitudinal time frame of this collection of student reports provides the opportunity to ask: How do Dutch students encounter, understand, and study “rural life” in Ireland during their fieldwork? What key themes emerge from students’ research projects? What do the student reports tell us about Irish rural life over the last ten years?

To answer these questions, we read and thematized the 251 student reports as a team. From this preliminary assessment of topics, we identified five major themes: 1) farmers and turf cutters; 2) migration; 3) community organization; 4) pub life; and 5) expressions of Irish culture.¹ Most students identified conceptual approaches related to the construction of Irish rural community life before arriving in Roscommon, based on their training in International Development Studies. Through encounters with “the field”, they arrived at thematic foci that either built on their initial conceptual understandings or pushed them to reframe their projects in ways that better reflected what they learned in Roscommon. As supervisors, we guided and supported them in this process.

After identifying the main themes that emerged in the reports, we created five thematic “teams” of two supervisors (authors of this paper) each, to read the associated reports more closely, summarizing students’ approaches and findings. Through an iterative and reflexive process, we discussed our thematic summaries as a group so that we could track similarities, differences, and changes in reports over time. We did not have access to students’ field materials, such as fieldnotes and interview transcripts. We did not interview or discuss this project with any of the 251 student authors. And we did not take the mark of the paper into account when analysing themes and conceptual framings. Instead, our analysis is based only on our review of final student reports that were submitted at the end of the course.

The writing team of this paper consists of supervisors who participated in the course in different years from 2011 to 2019. One supervisor participated in the course five times, while others participated anywhere from one to four years.² The first author, who is also the coordinator of the course, has supervised five to ten students every two years, and next to that has discussed many of the research reports with other supervisors. The most important reason that we chose to write this article as supervisors of the students, rather than inviting one or two students to be part of the writing team, is because the aim of the article is to provide an overview of the students’ work over time. We ask questions about the students’ research reports as educators and consider each report to be part of this broader time frame that helps us understand how students have observed and written about rural life in Ireland. Whereas focusing on individual student reports would have made it possible to present more ethnographic detail, it could not provide such an overview, nor would it allow us to see the reports in time and in comparison to others. This article, therefore, is based on a document analysis of the students’ reports, rather than on the ethnographic material that the students produced through their two-week

fieldwork. In addition, whereas the reports are accessible to the public (they are stored with the local partners that we work with), the ethnographic field materials were produced with the objective to write a report about them, and not an article. For that reason, it would not be ethical to use the field materials collected by the students for the writing of this article.

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section we discuss how the Field Research Practical course is embedded in the methods training of the students, and how it is positioned within the International Development Studies program at Wageningen University. We discuss two additional key factors that inform how students choose their research topic: the characteristics of the county where the fieldwork takes place, and global developments that shape the dynamics and transformations of rural life more generally. Next, we discuss our findings from the analysis of student reports, organized around the five central themes identified above: farmer livelihoods, migration, community organization, pub life, and expressions of Irish culture. Before we take leave in the final section, we dedicate a section to reflect on the three questions that were guiding for this article.

Situating and Positioning

Students who participate in the Field Research Practical are predominantly between the ages of 19 and 21; the vast majority are of Northern European descent (mostly Dutch and mostly white) and while the gender composition of the group changes year-to-year, there are typically more female than male students.³ English is the second language for virtually all students, and while they are fluent, they sometimes struggle with the Irish “accent”, as they call it. A minority of students in the course come from farming backgrounds, and for some this is their first time abroad on their own. For all students, this is their first field research experience.

The Field Research Practical is a course in the practical application of field research methods. It is a *methods course* explicitly, part of the compulsory methods training for International Development Studies students. The main learning objective of the course is to let students *experience* the complete research process, which they do alongside the guidance and support of supervisors. Students’ research projects in the course are best described as “mini-ethnographies”. In the first week of the course they write their research proposal, for which they use literature on Ireland that is relevant for their topic, as well as literature relevant for their theoretical framework (see below). Then, in two weeks of total immersion, they live with a host family in County Roscommon and become part of the daily whereabouts of the communities they live in. They pose qualitative research questions about people and place, including questions of how people give meaning to various aspects of rural life. They practice building rapport in a fieldwork situation, and work with various exploratory research techniques, including participant observation and qualitative interviews. Students also take the first steps toward being able to cope with and reflect upon (unexpected) fieldwork situations. In terms of analysis and reporting, students learn how to write fieldnotes as well as to organize and systematically analyse fieldwork material, and to present a written research report based on their own field research findings. They file their final research reports with Roscommon LEADER in Roscommon.

Students arrive at the research practical with previous training and coursework that influences how they position and frame their field research projects. Of most immediate influence is the Methods, Techniques and Data Analysis for Field Research course they take in the weeks before the Field Research Practical. Taught by this paper's first author, the preparatory course introduces students to different aspects of doing field research. They learn how to design research and formulate qualitative research questions and read about ethnography (Madden 2017: 15-35), participant observation (Bernard 2018: 272-307), writing fieldnotes (Emerson et al. 2011: 45-87) and ethnographic interviews (Spradley 2003 [1979]) and qualitative interviews (Hennink et al. 2020: 116-136). The preparatory course uses Madden's (2017) understanding of ethnography as a guiding line for the students. Students are assigned parts of Madden's textbook to introduce the idea of ethnography as an embodied experience in which researchers use all their senses during fieldwork. Our focus on embodied observation coupled with qualitative interviewing in the preparatory course helps shape the kinds of questions students pose. Predominantly, they ask exploratory research questions about how people in Roscommon experience and give form and meaning to social, economic, political and environmental changes in their daily lives. In addition to the preparatory pre-fieldwork course, three other factors shape the content of students' research reports. First, in addition to personal interests, the themes they choose to explore in their fieldwork largely originate in the theories and approaches they study in previous courses in the International Development Studies degree program. The course on Rural Households and Livelihood Strategies is especially influential. In this course students become acquainted with anthropological, sociological and economic perspectives on rural livelihood strategies, taking the work of Scoones (2015) on rural livelihood strategies as a point of departure, complemented with anthropological articles about migration and livelihood strategies (for example Tamagno 2003), natural resource management and gender (Elmhirst 2012). They also learn about how an ethnographic perspective can help to understand how people diversify their livelihood strategies and the different ways that they might value and give meaning to natural resources. Hence, students read more about development-related issues in general – and especially in the “Global South” – as they prepare their field research practical in Ireland. Through a basic understanding of disciplinary approaches, some students might take an anthropological approach to their research topic, whereas others might prefer to study Irish rural life from a perspective of development economics.

Second, the specific characteristics of County Roscommon and the experiences of people living there inspire students' topic choice. Prior to beginning the research, students have no formal training in “rural life” in Ireland. Instead, the place remains a new “case” through which to explore the use of ethnographic methods and concepts from development studies. County Roscommon – characterized by green hills dotted with farmlands – is in the West of Ireland and has a population of about 64,000 inhabitants (Roscommon County Council n.d.). Major towns include Roscommon, Boyle, Strokestown and Castlerea. During the fieldwork, students stay with a host family.⁴ The host families' living conditions vary widely; whereas some students live on an isolated farm for two weeks and cycle several

hours a day to reach their research participants, other students stroll the streets and markets of Roscommon Town. Furthermore, there are large differences in socio-economic position between the different host-families. Some are farmers, others are unemployed and others run successful businesses. Hosts often introduce students to the area, talk with them about their own lives and help them make contacts for conducting their research. Students might conduct interviews with the host families, as well as with their friends and neighbours.

Third, analysing how the topics that students study change over time shows that students' work is further shaped by developments beyond the scope of local control that impact rural realities and people's experiences. For example, the first batches of research reports that we reviewed for this article (from around 2011) framed research topics within the economic collapse/recession at that time, looking into issues such as unemployment, the housing crisis, and out-migration. Another set of reports considers the Drink Driving Law that came into effect in 2011 and the smoking ban, implemented in 2004, exploring how these developments shaped community pub life. Students doing research about farmers and livelihood strategies have positioned their research within several EU subsidy schemes and the Brexit referendum (although Brexit is United Kingdom only, it caused anxieties among farmers and entrepreneurs in Roscommon who, living close to the border with Northern Ireland, maintained close economic and social ties with this part of the United Kingdom). A smaller number of students examined how the 2015 same-sex marriage referendum and the 2018 abortion referendum were embedded in local politics and Church life.

Observing Irish Rural Community Life

The five themes that emerged from reviewing and categorizing student research reports — farmers and turf cutters, migration, community organization, pub life and expressions of Irish culture — mirror the key topics of Irish anthropological literature (see Donnan 2017). This continued focus on the dynamics of community life, combined with the short period in which the students can do fieldwork, might result in the reproduction of stereotypes of Irish rural life, but can also disclose new or emergent dynamics that are often shaped by national and global developments.

Many students, especially those who do research on farmers' livelihoods and migration, frame their research questions within a theoretical framework of sustainable livelihoods from their earlier coursework (see above). Within this framework, they might focus on diversification, sustainable livelihood strategies or multi-local livelihood strategies. Students who work on topics related to pub life, community organization and expressions of Irish identity often use social capital, social networks and social cohesion as a way of framing their research questions. Fewer, but still a significant number of students, have used concepts such as belonging and place-making as a way to understand migration processes, but also to analyse constructions of Irish identity. Students working on farmers' livelihoods and turf have also used theoretical approaches that focus on valuation and meaning-giving processes towards land. Gender has appeared as a transversal analytical angle, and students have applied a gender analysis to farmer livelihoods and pub life, among others.

The following sections summarize key findings for each theme from the 251 student reports we reviewed.

Farmers and Turf Cutters

The large number (49) of student reports on farming and turf is in line with the focus on rural life that has been central to Irish anthropology since the 1930s (Donnan 2017), but also reflects the influence of the courses that the students have taken, as well as broader socio-political developments. Despite starting from different analytical frames — e.g. gender roles, EU regulations, sustainability — the reports about farmers and turf cutters converge on two major themes related to rural life: the almost ubiquitous necessity of livelihood diversification in Roscommon farm economies and the relation of farming and turf cutting with identity constructs.

In characterizing the landscape and farms, students invariably report the observations from farmers that soil quality, waterlogged soils and farm size constrain on-farm diversification options. Crop agriculture is limited, and only a few farms use hoop house style vegetable production, largely for increasingly visible farmers' markets and organic sales opportunities. Livestock farming is more common, as most farmers have come to specialize in particular sectors of beef or sheep value chains. Only a few larger farms in Roscommon have herds of dairy cattle, as land holdings are generally too small to make dairy production profitable. Farmers' lack of capital to buy and consolidate land is a barrier to scaling up, but more importantly, they see the transformation of small-scale farms to larger ones as counter to the historic rural landscape that they value.

Farmers are very aware that global shifts and conditions have had an impact on the viability of their livelihood in the past decade. Throughout the reports, farmers point to non-local events such as the consolidation of beef slaughterhouses and subsequent farm-gate prices, market access and EU regulations as directly impacting their livelihoods. In reports from 2012-2013, the financial crisis was still a relevant frame for farmers discussing constraints. The crisis was felt not so much within the farming per se, but more so in the sectors where farm households had their off-farm employment. In mid-decade reports the role of EU regulations and subsidy constraints became important livelihood frames. Despite Brexit having been a conversation in England since 2016, it is not until 2018 that the spectre of Brexit became a topic that students explored. In addition to other everyday challenges, farmers feared for the cross-border trade with the United Kingdom, which is one of the main outlets for Irish beef and dairy products. Global climate change and the increasingly variable precipitation and increased limitations on cropping were also noted as constraints to farm livelihoods.

In Ireland as elsewhere, farmers make use of subsidies as a livelihood strategy. Students report that farmers are largely strategic in their engagements and choices for obtaining EU subsidies, often taking up subsidies that require compliance for practical rather than ideological considerations. For example, several farmers have jumped on the opportunity to switch to organic farming after the EU began offering subsidies in 2015. Because of the great bureaucratic investment required to benefit from organic

regulations and certifications, farmers have partnered with neighbours or hired consultants to manage the paperwork.

Despite the importance of EU subsidies, farmers are reported to have an ambivalent relationship with the regulations that accompany farm payments and feel they are too much at the receiving end of top-down bureaucracy. So, with these subsidies decreasing in value over time, and the payback penalty ending after five years, some farmers in the 2018 and 2019 reports acknowledge they will be ceasing to comply with all the organic regulations in 2020 as the costs of those activities are not offset by the benefits.

In addition to subsidies, a second way that farmers manage to keep afloat is by diversifying household income. This becomes clear from, among other examples, the following illustration from a student report:

It's 4:30 a.m. and Anthony (pseudonym) arises to go out to the cattle in the field behind his house, checking them over, and putting out feed. By 6:20 with some farm chores done, he gets in his car for the long drive into Dublin, which is over 100km away, arriving by 8:00 for the "start of work." At 5:00pm he drives home and then commences evening chores on the farm. After which is dinner and putting the kids to bed. And then to bed himself. And then he starts the cycle again tomorrow. Having lived and worked in Dublin as a younger man, when his father was interested in retiring from farming, Anthony moved back to Roscommon to take over the farm. Though he considered letting the land go, in the end he decided that he liked being a farmer, having grown up in the farming lifestyle, and wanted to be able to pass the skills and land on to his own children. However, the returns on the beef cattle are not sufficient income in themselves so he is unable to give up the paid job in Dublin. Such dual work brings sacrifices, especially in relation to time with the family. Family time in the weekdays consists of meals and putting the kids to bed. On the weekends there is more flexibility, as there is no "Dublin work" and Anthony can watch his kids in their youth sports leagues and other events. But an important social time comes in taking the kids to help out on the farm.

This case might seem an extreme example of the time commitment of diversifying a Roscommon farm with a paid job, but it does capture the importance of "being a farmer" that many students write about in their reports. Only a few farmers reported jobs in Dublin, but most have some form of off-farm employment. Several students report that in farm households with a husband-wife structure, women often engage in fulltime off-farm employment as an important livelihood strategy. Men, who tend to do most of the on-farm productive work, may also be employed outside of the farm, sometimes with full-time jobs. Several student reports show that off-farm employment not only helps to keep the household

financially viable, but that these incomes fund and support farming activities. In other words, without the extra income there would be no money for farming.

As pragmatic as farmers seem to be in navigating subsidy schemes, the inverse can be observed when it comes to their urge to farm. Almost invariably, student reports acknowledge that the farmer lifestyle in Roscommon is fraught with uncertainty and not necessarily financially remunerative. However, as put by one student, needing off-farm income was not seen by the farmers as a sign of farm failure since farming is considered a lifestyle, and not just an economic activity. Most of the reports emphasize that farming is rooted in social and family relations and is a fundamental part of the lives and social fabric of rural communities — one report even speaks of farming as therapeutic. Similarly, the ability to cut and burn one's own turf, often from turf banks that have been cut by families for generations, is expressed as an important cultural marker. For some, the smell and quality of the heat of turf burning evoke tradition and "Irishness".

In discussing farming as a social activity, some students note that events like cattle auctions and farmer association meetings become important social spaces. Farmers may visit cattle auctions, market events and rural pubs to participate in farmer-to-farmer conversations. Social isolation for single farmers and the trend of ageing farmers were noted by students as important demographic conditions; the potential loss of access to "social" elements of farmers' lives through pub closures or retirement from farming was discussed as a potential avenue to social isolation for elders. These larger networks in which farmers operate are vastly male dominated spaces. A farmer identity is largely seen as a male identity and farms are generally passed onto male successors within families.⁵ Even when women actively participate in farm chores or the running of farm activities, quite a few respondents note that such work is not really "women's work". Still, students find that both males and females represent themselves as belonging to farming households and place value on that identity.

With strong identity sentiments around farming and turf comes the idea that disengaging from these activities is not an option. Farming and turf cutting need to be supported not because of strict economic rationality but because of their role as important markers of being Irish and belonging to rural Irish spaces and communities. These ideational constructs of farming then play out in desires and imaginations of the future. Student reports about out-migration of youth (see below) show that parents hope that their kids will come back, hopefully with more professional opportunities to pursue, but maintaining farming on the side nonetheless.

Migration

Migration is the second major theme that students took on as a lens to study rural Roscommon. Historically, migration has left a deep imprint on Irish culture, starting with the first migration wave of Irish people to America and Britain to escape poverty, disease and death during the Great Famine in the 1840s (Ó Gráda 2007), also discussed in the anthropological work of, among others, Brody (1986 but originally published in 1973) and Messenger (1983). Ever since, the country has seen patterns of emigration and immigration influenced by economic shocks. In more recent times, especially between

the 1990s and the late 2000s, Ireland experienced a period of rapid economic growth (the “Celtic Tiger”), which resulted in an inflow of returning Irish nationals as well as migrants from non-EU countries. With the enlargement of the EU and changing migration policies, migration patterns shifted again as “low-skilled” workers arrived from Eastern European countries. Currently, Ireland is experiencing a new wave of out-migration, internationally to Australia and Canada, and internally from rural areas to larger cities in Ireland as unemployment rates increased rapidly after the 2008 economic recession (Fanning 2018; Gilmartin 2015). These various migration flows found their ways into the student reports, out of which two main themes emerged: firstly, out-migration after the 2008 recession with an emphasis on the effects on those who were “left behind”, and secondly, immigration and ethnic or national diversity in the countryside.

Current flows of out-migration consist of young people in their early twenties, most of whom leave rural communities due to the lack of job opportunities and an absence of higher education institutes in the area. Because few young people were present to interview, students focused on the perceptions of families who stayed behind. Those remaining are not only affected in their daily lives, but miss their family members especially during holidays and family gatherings, even though they communicate through social media and other digital means. Some families mentioned the opportunities that the migration of their family members brought as they had new places to visit, while it became clear that quite a few out-migrated youth aspire to return home if employment opportunities allow. While families found ways to stay together, communities more broadly feel the impact of out-migration by the younger part of the population. Pubs and shops are closing, and the population is ageing, which impacts remaining youth and the opportunities for cultural life, nightlife and social events around Gaelic football, for instance (see below).

Alongside the narratives of depopulation of the countryside and the emigration of younger generations after the 2008 crisis, students studied new diversity in Roscommon, most notably an influx of Brazilians, Eastern Europeans and asylum seekers from non-EU countries. In the 1990s and 2000s the county experienced a large influx of Brazilian migrants who were initially recruited to come work in meat factories. The students’ findings point toward a close-knit Brazilian community that is constructed through social activities such as Brazilian BBQs, traditional celebrations and various Brazilian churches. The Lithuanian and Polish communities that arrived in the early 2000s also emphasized the importance of food and traditional celebrations. Most Brazilians still had strong social and economic ties to their homeland and the first-generation migrants strongly identified as Brazilian, whereas the younger generation tended to identify with both cultures. Students also found a great amount of interaction between the Irish and Brazilian communities. For example, one student writes about a Brazilian mass being translated into English and attended by the Irish while other reports mention the Brazilians’ interest in Irish traditions like Gaelic football and folk music.

How the different groups of newcomers were perceived by (mostly white) Irish communities varies in the students’ accounts. Some reports, for example, mention an increase in discrimination and hostility

towards the Brazilian community with the 2008 economic crisis and increased competition for jobs. Two student reports on Ballaghaderreen, where refugees came to make up 10% of the population, show how the Irish history of migration can inform the attitude towards refugees:

In 2017 a new Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC) in the small town Ballaghaderreen was opened and refugees came to make up 10% of the population. Initially, local people were worried because they received little information and were left out of the decision-making process by the authorities. Eventually, however, the residents used their social networks to include refugees in the community, for which they even received an award, illustrating that a small town can successfully host many refugees. Irish residents of Ballaghaderreen seem to understand their positive welcoming attitude towards the new mainly Syrian refugees as closely connected to their own history of migration during the Great Famine. An old Irish lady who was interviewed by one of the students remarked that migration is in the blood of Irish people: they know what it is like to leave everything behind to start a new future in another country and how important it is to be welcomed.

In sum, students' reports show how migration shapes community dynamics in different ways. Migration not only transforms the social composition and organization of communities, as we will see below, but the Irish history of migration might also shape the social dynamics of receiving and welcoming migrants in Irish communities.

Community Organization

The cluster of students that worked on community organization researched topics like community centres, the church, women's networks and Tidy Towns. This research theme also includes reports that examine the organization of local social events, both traditional and new, such as the yearly coordination of bonfires and the organization of the *Town of 1,000 Beards* event in Ballymoe in 2012. Most of the students that worked with themes surrounding community organization have used the concept of social capital to analyse the intersections of social relations and community life. Accordingly, two trends that become visible across these research projects stand out: first, rural communities are often characterized as equally vulnerable and resilient, which reflects a central debate in Irish anthropology about the glory and demise of rural life in Ireland (Donnan 2017); and second, the importance of volunteers in community building.

Student reports that portray the Irish countryside as peripheral and “run-down” – offering few opportunities and having passed its former glory – sometimes also capture voices that express sentiments of being left behind by the national government or struck by misfortunes like economic crises that are beyond local reach. For instance, some students reported about towns that were side-lined because of a road bypass, while others discussed how factory closures had a negative impact on local employment and hence the socio-economic bases of rural life. However, reports also document vibrant

communities rooted in community engagement and efforts for rural revitalization. Students describe a plethora of local events and activities made possible by volunteers and (local) government support, which complements the gloomy narrative with a more comprehensive image of rural community resilience and resourcefulness.

The interrelated notions of vulnerability and resilience related to analyses of community organization might be further illustrated by looking into the Tidy Towns phenomenon that features in several student reports. The history of the Tidy Towns competition dates back to 1958 when it formed part of the An Tostal festival. This event, intended as a welcoming of Irish emigrants returning home for holidays, originated during times of economic recession to boost local development and encourage a sense of national pride. Cleaning, small repairs and improvements of the public space provided an opportunity to engage unemployed inhabitants, who were sometimes remunerated with resources and tools or paid a small wage. Over time, Tidy Town events became part of a yearly competition with around 700 participating communities, independently coordinated by local Tidy Town Committees. In 2007, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government became involved in the organization of the competition, which led to a development of the initial objective – improving the local environment and strengthening community relations – in other directions, such as nature protection and sustainable lifestyles. This development is probably best illustrated by the case of Ballintubber, which has drawn four students to focus their fieldwork on its Tidy Town Committee in particular. The following illustration is based on these four student reports.

Ballintubber has won the competition multiple times since the local Tidy Town Committee was established in 1967. In the first years, the competition was seen as an opportunity to beautify the town while simultaneously generating casual jobs for unemployed inhabitants. Among these jobs, cleaning up litter, painting gates, building walls, and maintaining greenery are mentioned as typical tasks. Some residents point out that the results of these efforts are still visible in the town today. A restored church wall or the network of street lighting which, one inhabitant states, is otherwise rarely seen in villages of the same size, function as a reminder of earlier Tidy Town initiatives. Following the introduction of environmental categories in the competition, Ballintubber has worked with a local ecologist to develop a Biodiversity Action Plan. The plan includes local habitat assessments and promotion of good biodiversity management, which materialised among other things in the planting of bee-friendly flowers and the creation of bug hotels in the community garden. At the same time, the initial focus on cleaning litter was expanded to raise awareness of recycling processes and waste prevention: “Renew, Reuse and Recycle” has become one of the mottos of Ballintubber’s Tidy Town Committee. In this way,

caring for both the social and natural local environment provides new ways of giving meaning to the community.

Such dynamics of giving meaning to the appearance of the town and the building and nurturing of social relations is also echoed on the town's website, which states that: "As a testament to the commitment of the local residents to look after the village, Ballintubber [sic] is regularly shortlisted for numerous local, regional and national tidy towns awards."⁶ Apart from practical outcomes, the Tidy Town Committees are often important social hubs that mobilise a sense of community and belonging. In Ballintubber members of the Tidy Town committee readily present themselves as "the town's team" and are actively involved in local events beyond the Tidy Town competition. In turn, inhabitants consider them the town's representatives or, in some cases, jokingly refer to one of the members as the municipality's unofficial mayor. Indeed, aspirant Tidy Towns are not only evaluated on their results in beautifying the locality, but also on the level of participation across the towns. The competition provides an opportunity to work on a shared goal while concurrently strengthening social relations and place attachment. Mobilising volunteers and connecting with diverse groups of inhabitants is among the key roles of Tidy Town committees, who rely on volunteers for tasks ranging from painting and sweeping to managing social media.

Other student reports examine community organization by exploring how the notion of volunteering becomes valuable on both individual and community levels. For example, several reports indicate that actively volunteering in community organizations increases individuals' social capital and enables them to gain new skills, thus alleviating some of the challenges of obtaining a paid job. In addition, volunteering is generally seen as "doing good for the community". Community service, self-fulfilment and local pride are some of the motivations for volunteering identified by the students. At the same time, some of the reports point to volunteering as a social norm and an important prerequisite for social inclusion and community belonging, especially for newcomers. Furthermore, network mapping of community activities and organizations, done by several students, shows that such community organizations often rely on a relatively small group of people taking on multiple roles in different initiatives. This not only risks making community organizations vulnerable but can also lead to social tensions around diverging expectations and uneven levels of participation.

Pub Life

Every year, the Irish pub captures the interest of a subset of students as a symbol of Irish cultural heritage or as a social aspect of rural communities. Topics explored in students' reports are the "Irishness" of pubs, along with certain features of drinking culture that are seen as part of Irish identity, the importance

of the pub as a meeting place and the decline of the pub following general trends like the recession, out-migration, regulations and generational transitions.

The pubs that feature in the students' reports are commonly described as family-run businesses that offer a social space for mostly male farmers of advanced age. Some regular visitors go to the pub to feel less lonely. In some instances, pubs are also ascribed a "monitoring role", with pub owners getting insights into the problems and well-being of their regular customers. Additionally, pubs function as important venues for cultural activities, such as watching Gaelic football and hurling, storytelling and live music performances, as well as card-playing evenings and friendly competitions or group gatherings such as meetings of local ladies' groups. These activities tend to follow a weekly or monthly schedule with fixed days. In some cases, fundraisers serving a communal purpose are mentioned as a reason for people to visit the pub. Pubs might also run donation boxes in support of local institutions, such as the local church or sports club. These activities demonstrate that pub owners are concerned about supporting community initiatives, sponsoring activities such as sports clubs and taking up a facilitating role in their communities.

Historically, women were not allowed to drink alcohol in pubs up until the 1960s (Molloy 2002). The women's movement paved the way for pubs to become a common shared space, open to both men and women. Looking at pub culture through a gender lens, however, students observed that the pub-goers are still predominantly men. Moreover, it appears that men, more often than women, visit the pubs by themselves and have a chat with whomever else may be at the pub at the time without making prior arrangements. Hence, students observe pub culture to be more open to men than to women, confirming Donkersloot's (2012) finding that women are excluded from being full participants of rural pub culture. Nonetheless, the pub, a once prominent feature of rural Irish social life, seems to be on the decline. This also comes to the fore in the following paraphrased description of the history of the local pub from a student report.

In 1961 the pub owners achieved a license to open the pub in their community. Initially, the pub was an enormous success, allowing the owners to relegate farming to the side of their livelihoods. The pub was an important social hub for the farmers in the area, and the bar had to be extended with a lounge area to accommodate all the visitors. The local soccer team also provided for a steady stream of visitors to the pub, as did an increasing number of plumbers and traders in the Celtic Tiger years. Especially this last group had a lot of money to spend and could be found in the pub as early as 6am on some days. This success story came to an abrupt end when the pub burned down in 2009, coinciding with the economic recession. The pub was rapidly rebuilt with the help of neighbours but it has only welcomed around 30 customers a week ever since as unemployment and out-migration made it more difficult for the pub to make its comeback as a central hub for the community.

The above illustrates a broader trend noted by students: pubs are closing, and the number of pub-goers is in decline. Research participants point to the increasing number of regulations – such as drink-driving laws – as contributing to the decline in pub visits, since pub visitors tend to get there by car. The smoking ban and longer opening hours for supermarkets selling cheaper alcohol are said to further deter pub-goers. The recession further shaped pub life, resulting in fewer pubs and reduced opening hours. Out-migration, due to a lack of local education and employment opportunities, contributed to the ageing of the community, which seems to have direct consequences for pubs in terms of visitors. Nonetheless, pubs remain an integral part of the local landscapes in rural Ireland as a place where people come together, drink, chat and watch a soccer game together.

Expressions of Irish Culture

Students' attention was also regularly drawn to common expressions of Irish culture, varying from the Irish language, Irish music and dance, folklore storytelling and, most popular among students, Gaelic football. Students explored how these cultural expressions contribute to a sense of "being Irish" and foster social relations, using (theoretical) concepts such as identity, social capital, community feeling and belonging. The image that arises from students' findings is one of intergenerational differences in the significance of expressions of Irish culture in people's daily lives, as well as of the importance of governmental policies and other institutions in maintaining these cultural expressions.

Students' reports demonstrate a divergence between an "older generation" that often attaches a nostalgic meaning to, for example, Irish music, the Irish language or telling local folklore stories, and a younger generation that sometimes feels like these traditional activities are imposed on them. Some of the elderly voices captured in student reports express a fear of losing the "true" Irish identity through the diminishing importance of traditions. Today's young parents share this concern and continue to stress the importance of maintaining traditions and ensuring that their children are exposed to varying expressions of Irish culture. Interestingly, even though families attribute high value to this exposure, students' reports show that passing on these cultural elements is often outsourced to others and is scarcely done at home.

This is nicely illustrated in one of the students' reports that touches upon the theme of rambling and Irish music classes.

Back in the days, teaching Irish music was not a career. Music classes were not needed, because skills passed on through "rambling". As nearly everyone played music at home, older people would pass on these skills to the younger generation. Many people [who] used to play music when they were younger people would go to each other's houses just to entertain each other with music. It was not paid, people just did it for the love of the Irish music. Today, also older people take lessons and learn to play tunes like the "Rose of Castlerea" an old song of Castlerea on the accordion.

Maintaining and passing on expressions of Irish culture, then, hinges on governmental policies and the institutions where those policies come to life, such as schools, social clubs and summer colleges. The Government of Ireland plays an important role in maintaining the Irish language, e.g. through the *Official Languages Act of 2003* and the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*. Education plays a central role in those strategies, with the Irish language a compulsory subject throughout elementary and secondary school. Traditional Irish music is taught at schools as well. Pupils learn to play some traditional tunes on the tin whistle, and Irish dance is part of physical education.

Most student reports point out that Irish cultural expressions often play an important role in creating a community feeling and a sense of belonging. For instance, Gaelic football offers the opportunity for communities to get together during the weekends and is seen as one of the main social activities in the region, providing a chance to meet for people who often live far from each other in these rural areas. Moreover, Gaelic football is said to reinforce individuals' feelings of connectedness to their towns. Other student reports illustrate that Irish music is generally played and enjoyed together in pubs, and sometimes family homes, serving to connect people. Similarly, Irish dancing groups for children play a role in expanding children's social networks.

Though students outline a general image of a fear of loss of the Irish culture by the "older generation", they also point out that Irish cultural expressions have become increasingly hybrid – they are mixed with popular culture and adapted to today's life and needs. For example, Irish expressions have become part of the English language in translated form, and there are public debates about making Irish lessons at schools more attractive by adding fun elements through drama and music. Folklore storytelling might no longer be used much for the purpose of entertainment in the family sphere, but increasingly serves the function of attracting and informing tourists interested in local culture. Traditional Irish music is increasingly mixed with styles like pop, country, rock and orchestral, keeping a younger generation interested and engaged.

Reflecting

The thematic convergence of student reports with scholarly accounts from Irish anthropology (see Donnan 2017) suggests that students are picking up on important features of Irish rural life. Although they are in the field for only two weeks and arrive with personal and educational preconceptions, they have been able to identify key practices and concerns in the everyday lives of people in Roscommon. Surely, the "mini-ethnographies" of individual students can only scratch the surface of rural life, offering quick insights and reflections. But studied in aggregate, ten years of "quick insights" speak volumes about what are the most observable issues that inflect the rural sphere. Our students' reports, when taken together, serve to "take the pulse" of rural life in Roscommon.

Through examining 251 student research reports, we set out to answer three questions: How do Dutch students encounter and study "rural life" in Ireland during their fieldwork? What key themes emerge from students' research projects? What do the student reports tell us about Irish rural life over the last ten years? We now briefly reflect on the answers to these questions.

First, students encounter "rural life" in Roscommon through various positions and lenses. While almost all students are Dutch, they have different — rural, urban and suburban — backgrounds. Academically, students come with disciplinary training in rural sociology and development studies, and with their individual research proposals. Over the course of their two weeks in Roscommon, students grapple with the realities of ethnographic fieldwork, and the space between research plans and expectations on the one hand, and the on-the-ground realities of what can be accomplished on the other. Moreover, students come into direct contact with the everyday lives and agency of the people they live, participate and conduct interviews with. Within these interactions students' research goals and questions often shift. Research participants often come to guide conversations as they share and teach students about their lives. In short, students initially encounter Irish rural life through the academic lenses they are just learning and deepen their engagements through their own lived experiences of doing fieldwork.

Second, as we detailed in the previous section, the core themes that emerged from the students' reports were farmers and turf cutters, migration, community organization, pub life and expressions of Irish culture and identity. Whereas "farmers" and "migration" are both themes that connect the Irish countryside to broader global developments, the other research topics more firmly build on classic portrayals of Irish rural community life and showcase fears for loss of community values and organizations, nostalgia for "traditions" and better economic conditions, as well as spirited volunteers and Gaelic football clubs that function as important sites for social interaction.

Finally, what can we learn from reviewing a decade of student reports from their fieldwork in Roscommon? Importantly, we found that the main themes students examined centre on the lived experiences of rural life. What's more, the five specific themes we identified remained consistent over the ten-year period. This is not to say that the collection of reports, or the rural lives they engage, are flat. To the contrary, the reports demonstrate changing and/or intensifying conditions in Roscommon linked to local, regional and global processes. Still, from our review, we found that the overriding challenges, concerns and values students picked up on during their stays in the County were largely consistent. In Roscommon, livelihoods — especially farm livelihoods — and migration are overriding concerns that shape and are shaped by transformations in rural life.

Many students studied farmer livelihoods, based in part on their previous studies and trends in rural sociology, and in part on the ever-present reality of livelihood struggles among farmers and turf cutters in Roscommon. The way students studied livelihoods changed based on markets and regulations set by regional actors (EU regulations, Brexit) and global conditions (2008 financial crisis) at the times of their research. Across the board, students found that farmers are aware of policy and other changes, anticipating how the "outside world" will impact their farms and planning accordingly. What comes through time and again in the reports is that farm households work to maintain farming as their way of life. In interviews with our students, farmers highlighted the ideational and cultural values they place on farming, also when they are under threat.

Student reports portray farmer livelihoods as being local, cultural and “Irish,” while also operating in relation to larger, global forces. A similar intertwining of local and global emerges in reports dealing with migration. Rooted in historical crises in the 19th century, migration is embedded in (rural) Irish culture and identity. From the well-known migrants who fled famine, to later migrants who left in search of economic and educational opportunities, out-migration is not new. Still, more recent rural-to-urban migration within Ireland is a clear and pressing concern for many in Roscommon. As in other parts of the world, as farming and rural livelihoods become more difficult to maintain, young people leave, taking their bodies, knowledge, ideas and income with them. Many respondents discussed this phenomenon and their feelings of loss with our students. On the flip side, in-migration has been growing in Roscommon (and rural Ireland) as international immigrants come to Ireland in the wake of economic growth, or more recently, the “refugee crisis”. In their fieldwork, students observed and inquired about how these outflows and inflows of people shape community life (social, political, economic) and what it means to be Irish.

Overall, shifts in livelihoods and migration in rural Irish communities are the product of, and at the same time shape, the ways that rural life is transforming. Falling farm income, more off-farm employment for especially women, more and different farm subsidy enrolments, fewer young people and an ageing rural population, and new international migrants and refugees are key ingredients in the shifting social scene. For some people, these and other changes compel them to cling to what they see as essential elements of community and of “being Irish”. They present these as core characteristics of rural life in Ireland to our students: Gaelic football, the pub, Irish folk music, turf cutting, farming, community organizations, among others.

The themes that students engage with are in line with themes in Irish anthropology, which suggests that students pick up on important, relevant issues that are at play in rural Roscommon. At the same time, students at times tend toward reproducing stereotypes that exist about “Irishness”, focusing on pub life and turf livelihoods, for example. We believe that this happens for two main reasons. First, students only spend two weeks in the field. Because the main objective of the course is to acquaint students with field research methods, we (as supervisors) might not push them very hard to explore “difficult” themes or work with research populations that are not easily accessible. Two weeks might also not be long enough to get beyond the ways that research participants prefer to present themselves. Second, and somewhat overlapping, students partly depend on their host families in terms of creating their network and making interview arrangements. Because various host families have been part of the project for several years, this means that, let’s say farmer X, might be interviewed by several students over the years. Research participants might direct students toward themes they think will interest students, or themes that they think are easily accessible in a short study.

At the same time, we have also found that students work on new topics, such as the refugee centre in Ballaghaderreen, the Brazilian community in Roscommon and the impact of out-migration on the community Gaelic football teams, among others. There are relatively fewer reports on these issues, in

part because we can only place a limited number of students in each of the places where these specific themes have come to the fore as important in the everyday life in rural Ireland. In addition, most students also (do their best to) frame the local phenomenon that their research is about within the broader socio-political and global context and formulate their research questions in relation to relevant developments of the time, like Brexit and relevant EU regulations.

Students tend to report on, and find salient, the things most emphasized by the people close to them during their short fieldwork. At the same time, many research participants shared thoughts, experiences and feelings with our students that went beyond a mere “tourist-like” engagement. They shared their fears of losing “Irish culture” and of the hollowing out of rural social relations as expressed in the closing of pubs and local shops, as well as the erosion of Irish language. Preserving what they see as “Irishness”, and perhaps “rural Irishness”, is a concern for many.

Taking Leave

Kilbride Community Centre, two weeks later. As we catch up with students and wait in the drizzle for the bus that will drive us to Dublin, students are dropped off by their host families. Some students laugh, hug and squeal with joy as they are reunited with their friends. Others cry softly as they say goodbye to their host families. Finally, we take leave, waving until the host families in front of the community centre disappear out of sight. When the bus approaches Dublin, students have moved from sharing stories about what they had for dinner and other fieldwork anecdotes to making plans for the weekend. A few students finish the writing of their field notes and only close their laptops as we take the exit to Dublin airport. Some of them will, we know from experience, turn back to visit their host family and keep in touch years after. In a couple of weeks, many of them will look back at these two weeks as a transformative experience during their studies. For the moment, they grab their suitcases, enter the airport, buy souvenirs for their loved ones, and drink a coffee. They are neither nervous nor shy. Their fieldnotes and interviews are saved in the course’s digital learning environment, and their embodied experiences are saved in their minds. They are almost ready to start writing their reports, offering glimpses into their observations of everyday life in rural Ireland.

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¹ The distribution of themes is as follows: farmers and turf cutters (49 reports), community organization (37 reports), migration (26 reports), expressions of Irish culture/identification (18) and pub life (17). Other, smaller clusters of papers covered topics that could very loosely be categorized into sustainability (16), sports (13), elderly (10), entrepreneurs (8), work (8), local politics (6), food (3), water (3), health (2) and tourism, Roscommon Mart, beauty ideals, fracking, poverty, heritage, host family, housing, love, media, education (1).

² Elisabet Dueholm Rasch (all years), Renée Beune (2017), Gijs Cremers (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), Lotje de Vries (2017), Pia Ferner (2016, 2017), Sarah Hunt (2011, 2012), Mindi Schneider (2019), Lucie Sovova (2019), Caspar Swinkels (2018, 2019), Floor van der Hout (2018, 2019), Chantal Wieckardt (2018), Karen van Zaal (2016).

³ We have not collected information on students' gender identification, so we use only "female" and "male". Similarly, we have not collected information on class, sexual orientation or racial identification.

⁴ Host families are in Athlone, Aughrim, Ballintubber, Ballaghaderreen, Ballinaheglis, Ballinare, Ballydangan, Ballyfarnon, Ballyforan, Ballymoe, Boyle, Caanbee, Carrick on Shannon, Castlebar, Castleplunkett, Castlerea, Clooneyquinn, Cootehall, Corrigeenroe, Curraghboy, Drumshannsb, Dysart, Elphin, Fairymount, Frenchpark, Keadue, Kearsly, Kiltievan, Knockcroghery, Lanesborough, Loughlynn, Moore, Rooskey, Roscommon (Town), Strokestown, Tanvey, Tarmonberry and Tulsk.

⁵ Only some students wrote about inheritance but did not go into the history of land division and the role of primogeniture in this.

⁶ <https://www.ballintubbervillage.com/our-village> (accessed 07/02/22).

HOMEMAKING, UNMAKING AND REMAKING: THE MULTIFACETED AND AMBIVALENT EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC LIFE IN IRISH–UKRAINIAN PRIVATE HOSPITALITY CONTEXTS

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Abstract: This article explores the domestic realities of citizens across Ireland that have welcomed Ukrainian refugees into their homes following Russia's 2022 invasion. Through in-depth ethnography, it uncovers how such arrangements disrupt both the material and imaginary dimensions of the home, constituting a process of home unmaking for hosts. This is shaped by intersecting factors relating to elements of war, the integration of refugees' identities, and shifts in relational dynamics. The process of home unmaking, however, is not exclusively negative; it works in tandem with acts of homemaking and remaking, creating an environment where elements of disruption coexist with continuity and opportunities for renewal. Such findings provide critical insights into the emotional and social complexities of private hospitality in the context of forced migration, while contributing to broader discourse on the home as a dynamic, non-fixed construct.

Keywords: private hospitality; Ukrainian refugees; Ireland; hosts; ethnography; war; domesticity; liminality; home unmaking; homemaking

Introduction

Since February 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has forced millions of Ukrainian citizens—primarily women and children—to seek refuge in EU countries. In response, a wave of solidarity has spread across the continent, with private hospitality – the act of local citizens hosting refugees in their own households – becoming a popular form of humanitarian support, as implemented by local and national governments alongside volunteer groups, non-profit organisations, private companies, and individuals (Bassoli 2022; Bassoli & Luccioni 2023).

Private hospitality gained attention during the so-called 2015 “refugee crisis” as a grassroots humanitarianism and an act of protest against restrictive migration policies (Della Porta & Steinhilper 2020; Merikoski 2021). Since then, it has become the subject of debate and interdisciplinary research, with scholars examining it on micro, meso, and macro scales (Bassoli & Luccioni 2023). Research has focused on its organisational features; its interaction with reception policies; host-guest profiles; motivations; and some outcomes of the hosting relationship, specifically relating to host-guest power asymmetries (Gerbier-Aublanc 2018; Ollittraut 2018; Gunaratnam 2021; Merikoski 2021; Boccagni & Giudici 2022). The literature, however, has yet to fully examine private hospitality within the context of

the Ukrainian crisis, though emerging studies are now addressing this gap (Crossley 2023; Birger et al. 2024; Burrell 2024). Additionally, more research is needed to connect private hospitality to critical literature on home and domesticity, with a particular focus on how the practice impacts the hosts' subjective experiences of home.

The following article seeks to address these aspects, focusing on ethnographic research conducted in Ireland. It examines the domestic lives of Irish hosts, particularly those affiliated with the Helping Irish Hosts community—a volunteer organisation that has successfully matched over 2,000 Ukrainian refugees with more than 1,000 households since March 2022 (Helping Irish Hosts 2024).

By examining their experiences, the article demonstrates how the act of private hospitality can disrupt the normative, relational and physical elements of the host's home, initiating a process of home unmaking that, in many cases, works symbiotically with homemaking and remaking.

This article aims to contribute to critical literature on the affective, micro-level experiences of refugee solidarity practices, as well as the field of scholarship relating to home and domesticity. It is thus structured as follows. First, I highlight the theoretical framework, drawing on feminist and socio-anthropological understandings of home as a multi-dimensional, fluid space shaped by the material, sensorial, relational and affective aspects of everyday life (Ahmed 1999; Mallet 2004; Pink 2004; Blunt & Dowling 2006). I also elaborate on the concept of home unmaking, and relevant multidisciplinary literature on hospitality. Next, I outline the methodological approach used in this research. The findings section examines various material, sensorial, and relational factors that contribute to unmaking - and remaking - within the hosts' home. It also explores the reactions and counter-reactions that hosts adopt in response to the challenges of home unmaking.

The article concludes by synthesising these findings and offering reflections on their significance for understanding the complex, often ambivalent, experiences of home in the context of private hospitality.

Home & Hospitality – A Conceptual Overview

To fully grasp processes of home unmaking, it is important to reflect on how a home is actually made in the first place. The act of homemaking refers to the suturing together of “relationships, identities, and materialities into a place called home” (Baxter & Brickell 2014: 134). It is an active and ongoing process, one involving not only meaningful emotions but also in-depth routines and mutual expectations, which shape both the material and imaginary components of the home (Blunt & Dowling 2006; Baxter and Brickell 2014; Boccagni 2018; Bertolani & Boccagni 2021).

The material, emotional and relational foundations of home, however, are vulnerable to forms of erosion – or to put it differently, processes of home unmaking (Bertolani & Boccagni 2021: 58). Coined by Baxter and Brickell, the term home unmaking is defined as the “precarious process by which material and/or imaginary components of home are unintentionally or deliberately, temporarily or permanently,

divested, damaged or even destroyed” (2014: 134). The home can be unmade from both the outside and the inside. External factors encompass political, economic, or environmental disruptions such as war and genocide (Meade, 2011), natural disasters (Morrice 2013), and forced evictions (Porteous & Smith 2001). Internal forces, on the other hand, can relate to family or marital breakdowns (Watkins & Hosier 2005), moving house (Ahmed 1999), domestic violence (Price 2002), homelessness (May 2000; Meth 2003), and death (Marcoux 2001; Wiles et al., 2012). In essence, home unmaking is often a natural part of the lifecycle of all homes.

Home is often unmade in some rather than all senses at any one time (2014:135). Similarly, it should not be taken to mean the complete “negative erosion of material integrity or a loss of attachment” to the home. Home unmaking can also be implicated in positive transformations – remakings – of the home (ibid). In many instances, processes of homemaking and unmaking unfold concurrently, emphasising the “irremediable entanglements” between both processes, as well as the fundamental ambivalence of the emplaced experience of home (Bertolani & Boccagni 2021). In such instances, the home becomes an ambiguously experienced space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, comfort and fear (Blunt & Varley 2004; Baxter & Brickell 2014). It can serve as both a space of freedom and a prison (Webber 2023; Jarvis & Mountain 2021).

I contend that the act of hospitality constitutes another process of home unmaking. By its very nature, hospitality necessitates the crossing of thresholds or boundaries, such as those demarcating the public from private, ‘yours’ from ‘mine’ (Bulley 2015; Derrida 1999a). As elucidated by Harney and Boccagni:

“The very arrival of the outsider [destabilises] the implicit rhythms, accommodations, synchronicity of actions... that create the implicit ‘commons’ in the home[...] In this sense, [they] denaturalise... self-evident routines and mutual expectations within the home, regardless of their intentions.” (2023: 317).

Essentially, the guest “undermine[s] the imagined internal solidarity and hegemonic naturalised authority of the home dynamics”, posing a threat to the ontological security of both the host and themselves in the process. (ibid).

While such metamorphosis can occur with any form of hospitality, it becomes particularly pronounced in the context of cohabitation between hosts and refugees. Indeed, the diverse temporalities of their experiences, often characterised by temporariness, transitions, and uncertain durations of stay in a specific location, disrupt the control over space that is essential for maintaining a sense of home, as well as hospitable dynamics (Douglas, 1991; Miranda-Nieto et al., 2020).

A 'double movement of transformation' (Näre 2009: 10) occurs when a refugee enters a host's household, introducing not only distinct cultural elements but also the weight of their traumatic histories of war, and their ongoing state of liminality. The concept of liminality, which denotes the experience of being suspended between different temporal and social realities, describes how refugees exist in a state

of flux—neither fully integrated into their host society nor entirely detached from their homeland (Akhaled & Sasaki 2021; Hartonen et al., 2022). In more traditional circumstances, refugees often navigate these challenges in isolation, confined to reception centres or state-provided accommodations (Brun 2015; Hartonen et al., 2022; Merikoski 2022). However, in the setting of private hospitality, this separation is dissolved as hosts become deeply attuned to and personally affected by the refugee experience (Merikoski 2022; Burrell 2024). The host's home, therefore, becomes transformed into a “diasporic space marked by solidarity, encounters, and [refugee] struggles” (Merikoski & Nordberg 2024: 5).

Each of these understandings lays the groundwork for my research, offering a lens through which to explore the complex subjective experiences of home unmaking in the context of private hospitality in Ireland.

Data & Methods

“What we call data is really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (Geertz 2003: 178). Thus, rather than striving for superficial detachment, researchers must recognise how their connection to the research subject can influence their analysis. In alignment with this understanding, it was essential for me to critically reflect on my own positionality - as an Irish female researcher in her thirties who has never hosted nor had family members involved in hosting. My interest in the topic of hosting was purely sparked by reports of these widespread efforts, and through my personal encounters with hosts from my local community. Such acquaintances facilitated trust and allowed me to eventually gain access to a broader network of hosts.

Between May and August 2023, I conducted both traditional and online ethnographic research with citizens hosting Ukrainian refugees throughout Ireland. Sixteen participants were recruited via word-of-mouth, snowball sampling and direct contact with the Helping Irish Hosts organisation. Participants ranged between 43 and 76 years of age, and were mainly women (12 out of 16) – a demographic that reflects broader trends in hospitality arrangements (see Ollitrait 2018; Gunaratnam 2021). This gender imbalance undoubtedly shaped the findings, as the perspectives of women are more prominently represented in this study. All participants identified as Irish. Additionally, all except one had been hosting at the time of research, providing a real-time perspective on experiences.

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. These conversations were predominantly conducted online via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. To ensure candid responses, interviews were scheduled at times when Ukrainian guests were not present. These were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented with handwritten notes to capture contextual nuances. Various descriptive codes such as “loss of connection to home” and “cultural tensions” were later employed to categorise the collected data. Participant observation was also conducted both online and in-person. In-person observations involved visiting hosts' homes and documenting observations in

a physical journal, while online observations centred primarily on interactions within the private Helping Irish Hosts' Facebook page. Public content shared by hosts on X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram were also consulted for further comprehensive insight.

Adhering to ethical guidelines, detailed consent forms were obtained, and the anonymity of each host was maintained through the use of pseudonyms. Ensuring the anonymity of hosts' social media posts presents challenges as comments can often be traced back to their sources through search functions. Thus, I refrain from directly quoting online data as direct excerpts in this article. To enhance the credibility of the findings, member checking was also employed, allowing participants to review my interpretations and ensure their accuracy. All raw data was securely stored and promptly deleted upon research completion.

The Echoes of War

The impact of war-related realities was first highlighted by Dolores (aged 64), who had been hosting three women and a man for several months. Dolores found hosting refugees to be a rewarding experience that gave her and her husband a "sense of purpose". However, she also characterised the atmosphere in her household as challenging and inherently stressful. This Dolores contrasted sharply with other more traditional forms of hosting, such as student exchange and au pair arrangements:

"It's really not the same as those other types because here, you're dealing specifically with very vulnerable, very traumatised people, you know? I mean, there's always a lot of crying episodes... awful panic attacks too [...] They're physical here but mentally, they're back home... They're always on to family back in Ukraine, always have news on about the war, looking to see where has been bombed next, so it's not a comfortable environment to be in" (Interview Transcript, May 12th, 2023).

Witnessing her guests' trauma had become a new, unsettling normal for Dolores, weighing heavily on her and disrupting the comfort traditionally ascribed to the home space (Moore 1984). This sense of disruption was further compounded by their liminal state, as observed in their frequent communication with relatives in Ukraine, as well as their continuous monitoring of war-related news (Hartonen et al., 2022). Consequently, Dolores found herself feeling increasingly alienated from her home environment (Ahmed 1999), a sentiment powerfully encapsulated in her remark – "Sometimes, it doesn't even feel like you're in your own home anymore."

A similar account is provided by Mabel (aged 76) who had been living with a couple and their young daughter for several months. Like Dolores, Mabel illustrates how both the liminal stance and traumatic experiences of her refugee-guests had permeated the domestic sphere. Here, she compares the altered atmosphere in her home to the initial panic that surrounded the Covid-19 pandemic:

"It's a very peculiar setting to be living in. Very strange... D'you know what it reminds me of, d'you remember when Covid began, and [how] we were all running around so frantic, listening to the news day

and night? We were completely consumed by the death toll [...] Until a few weeks ago, both of them were home all day... on their phones all the time... Just endless worry and uncertainty” (Interview Transcript 12th May, 2023).

The majority of hosts’ narratives hint at the role of “polymedia” in significantly shaping their domestic environment. This concept refers to the various communication media, from video-calls to instant messaging, that migrants use to maintain a sense of care and connectedness with their families across distances (Madianou & Miller 2012). In the context of private hospitality, polymedia works to further dissolve the boundaries between home and faraway by bringing the socio-cultural and political realities of the guests’ homelands closer in an immediate and intensely sensorial manner – observations which have been previously emphasised by Merikoski (2022). A prime example in our own study comes from Gráinne (aged 46) who had just finished hosting a woman and her two sons at the time of our interview. Gráinne recounted a particularly memorable moment whereby the horrors of war had materialised in her own kitchen, via her refugee guest’s video-call to a friend back in Ukraine:

“I was making dinner [and] you could hear the explosions in the background[...] They’re the types of things that you’re not really prepared for... okay, we have news channels and see things about the war too, but... when it’s just you in your home... you normally can switch it off whenever it gets too intense. Here, you can’t do that because it’s all around you” (Interview Transcript, 14th May, 2023).

Gráinne’s reference to the ability to ‘switch... off’ is particularly poignant, encapsulating the notion of control and agency that individuals typically associate with their own personal spaces. Being able to switch off war-related news is an act of distancing oneself from discomfort, preserving the typical sanctuary-like nature of the home for many individuals (Boltanski 1999; Berlant 2004). For Gráinne, however, this became inevitably compromised when assuming the role of host. The traumatic realities of war infiltrated her domestic sphere, rendering it impossible to disconnect. Her later remark that “it sometimes felt like [she] was living in the middle of the war” starkly conveys this reality.

Several hosts—both in interviews and through conversations with one another on social media—have also described the ways in which stories of war have become entangled into their everyday domestic routines. One woman, for example, posted online about how her male guest would frequently discuss the latest bombings, show graphic images, and recount the daily death tolls to her family during shared mealtimes. While these interactions emphasised the growing trust between them, they also profoundly disrupted the emotional atmosphere of the home. Consequently, the host experienced heightened stress and anxiety in the household, coupled with concerns about the potential psychological impacts on her small children.

It is important to note that the intensity of these experiences is not uniform; the degree to which change occurs – both positive and negative - typically hinges on the specific host-guest relationship (Merikoski 2022). Those who form strong emotional bonds with their guests therefore often internalise these war-

related struggles more deeply, influencing not only their experience of home but also their broader emotional landscape, as personal and collective trauma begin to merge. One vivid instance comes from Séamus (aged 61) who had formed a close emotional bond with the young mother and son he had been hosting for almost a year. Here he described the many sleepless nights he and his wife had endured, consumed by worry about the war and its implications for the refugee family:

" You can't sleep thinking of all the dreadful things... how they'll get in contact with family... whether [they]were killed in battle... and how they'd cope... There's no peace of mind [...] You've to keep going as best you can but it gets you down " (Interview Transcript, 10th May, 2023).

Navigating Boundaries: Restrictions and Limitations

Beyond the direct impacts of war, the host-guest relationship often entails a reconfiguration of spatial, temporal, and social dynamics within the host's home. These may emerge organically as hosts and guests integrate into each other's spaces (Näre 2009; Merikoski 2022; Harney & Boccagni 2023), or they may be deliberately implemented to accommodate the specific needs of both parties (Burrell 2024). While some modifications enhance functionality and promote a harmonious living arrangement, others impose restrictions and limitations that can lead to a sense of alienation from the home environment (Ahmed 1999).

Several participants, for example, admitted feeling like 'trespassers' or 'guests' in their own homes, as certain rooms and activities—such as watching TV or playing music—effectively became 'off-limits.' This was especially true for hosts who perceived their guests as assuming a more 'dominant' role in the household - emphasising how the act of hospitality often disrupts the notion of absolute control over one's living space (Yeğenoğlu, 2012). Dolores, for instance, illustrated how this dynamic played out in her own life:

"Yeah, I've started going to bed earlier because... I used to watch programmes in the evening, but they use the sitting room a lot now...so I don't go in there. I kind of start telling myself, 'ah, you don't really need to watch it anyway'" (Interview Transcript, 23rd May, 2023).

In an effort to assert control, many hosts establish explicit boundaries, regarding the use of shared spaces. These boundaries are not rigid constructs but are continually enacted and tested as hosts and guests navigate their coexistence within the home (Douglas 1991; Harney & Boccagni 2023). However, while such measures may help reduce household tensions, they do not fully alleviate the challenges of home unmaking. Nuala (aged 51) presents a telling example. For five months, her family occupied the upper floor of their house, while their guests—a mother and son—resided on the ground level. While Nuala initially regarded such partitioning of space as optimal for her family, she gradually began to feel a loss of connection to her home, due to both her reduced living space, as well as the implications on her much-loved routines of spending time outside and hosting social gatherings:

"You are essentially giving up your house... [It] becomes very tight and fragmented. I used to enjoy going out to the patio, but I can't... because that's on their part of the house [...] We don't have friends over anymore because they stay in the part where we used to entertain... It's only when you can't do certain things that you realise how much you valued them, it's difficult" (Interview Transcript, 12th May, 2023).

In a similar vein, Mabel's experience underscored the impact hosting had on her social activities. She explained how, since becoming a host, "friends no longer [felt] comfortable dropping by for tea" — something which she had always been accustomed to, and deeply valued as part of living alone as an older woman in a rural Irish community. These shifts, however, were not solely due to her friends' hesitancy; Mabel herself was equally reluctant to extend invitations:

"Now I don't ask many over myself because, well... how would I integrate [the refugees] into our conversations? If somebody did the wrong thing, I mean, you don't know what kind of effect it could have. They're traumatised[...] You do miss the bit of company, people dropping by... there's an element of loneliness".

Mabel's experience underscores the profound sense of responsibility she assumed as a host, making personal sacrifices to ensure the emotional well-being of her traumatised guests (Burrell 2024). These sacrifices, however, gradually transformed her home into a space marked by increased social isolation, amplifying the sense of its unmaking (Jarvis & Mountain 2021; Wiles et al., 2012). This highlights how the concept of home is deeply interwoven with social relationships, both within and beyond the dwelling (Rowles 1978; 1983; Massey 1994; Baxter & Brickell 2014).

Much like Mabel, other hosts were acutely aware of the consequences that certain domestic routines and behaviours might have on their refugee-guests, and thus felt the need to adjust them accordingly. Several participants, for example, mentioned how they would typically wait until moments when their guests were out of the house to switch on the news, use loud electrical appliances, engage in DIY activities, or mow the lawn - activities which they felt had the potential to trigger distressing memories of war. Though the majority regarded such adjustments as minor - causing relatively little personal inconvenience, as time progressed, many began to feel the cumulative toll. As Gráinne put it, "It starts to feel as though you're constantly walking on eggshells. Sometimes, we didn't know if we were coming or going".

In addition to external behaviours, hosts often engage in what Hochschild (1983) terms "emotional labour", regulating and suppressing their emotions to meet the expectations of their role as host. This typically entails maintaining a calm and supportive demeanour at all times, even in moments of frustration or emotional strain, so as to not cause fear or upset to their guests (Askins, 2014; Atkinson, 2018; Maestri & Monforte, 2020). This continuous effort to manage emotions often results in emotional

burnout, and further diminishes the hosts' sense of home as a space of comfort and authenticity. As Róisín remarked:

"There's this forced politeness... you've to smile and be supportive and calm, but

like then there's times when something might annoy you or you'd feel down... but you're not really able to show it, you can't give out [...] So like, yeah... you've to put on this sort of show all the time [...] It's like you can't just be yourself" (Interview Transcript, 13th May, 2023).

Integrating Identities

We have thus far explored many of the factors that unmake the host's home. However, it is important to recognise that private hospitality introduces a profound heterogeneity of experiences, many of which are laden with ambiguity (Komter & van Leer 2012; Gerbier-Aublanc 2018; Boccagni & Giudici 2022). In some cases, unmaking simply alters the home's feel, while in others, it imbues the space with vibrancy and even enhances its sense of homeliness.

The integration of guests' domestic practices and cultural identities often evoked these types of transformations. Such elements essentially reshape the sensorial landscape of the host's home through new sights, sounds, and smells thus altering the very essence of what made it familiar (Pink 2004). For the most part, hosts welcome these changes, expressing their enthusiasm for engaging with different ways of life, and recognising such openness as essential to the hosting experience. Betty (aged 47), for instance, who had hosted two sets of families in two years, spoke positively about the various Ukrainian rituals and decorations that had made their way into the main areas of her household, as well as the regular playing of Ukrainian music:

"Little things have been added here and there... like so, there'd be little Ukrainian decorations, some traditional figurines and these little hand-painted eggs [Pysanky]... in the kitchen and sitting room, we made those at Easter... There'd often be some Ukrainian music playing too... Which is absolutely lovely... I mean, it helps them feel more at home, and that's the main thing" (Interview Transcript, 15th May, 2023).

Aspects of Ukrainian culture were also woven into the hosts' regular domestic routines, particularly through food—a medium often referred to as the "trope of the host-migrant encounter" (Näre 2009: 10). Many guests prepared traditional Ukrainian meals for their host families on a weekly basis, not only as an expression of gratitude and reciprocity (Komter & van Leer 2012: 18-19) but also as a means of creating "bubbles of homeliness" (Vandervoordt 2017) within an otherwise unfamiliar environment. As time progressed, some hosts began adopting these culinary practices, learning to prepare Ukrainian dishes under the guidance of their guests, while sharing their own cultural recipes in return. Barbara (aged 52), who had been hosting a non-English-speaking woman for nearly a year, exemplified how

regular cooking exchanges not only strengthened their relationship, but also provided them with moments of respite from the realities of war:

“It’s become a nice ritual for us, and it makes her happy to share these parts of her culture... helps take your mind off all the bad things [...] I’d say I actually [cook] more Ukrainian food than Irish these days. She taught me how to make Borscht... and these dumplings... so I tend to make them [a lot]... But I showed her how to make stuff like shepherd’s pie too” (Interview Transcript, 21st May, 2023).

However, not all aspects of the guest’s domestic culture are perceived positively. Some can also give rise to moments of intergroup tension (Boccagni & Giudici 2022; Bassoli & Luccioni 2023). Marianne (aged 51), who had been living with two sisters for four months, described how her kitchen “reeks of borscht soup” most evenings when she returns home from work, causing her to feel “not as happy or comfortable in [her] own environment” (Interview Transcript, 16th May, 2023). Additionally, numerous hosts – both on social media and through interviews - expressed frustration over their guests’ preference for keeping curtains drawn during the day, and their inconsistent recycling habits, which often conflicted with their own environmentally conscious lifestyles.

In addition to this, language barriers further disrupted home dynamics for many hosts. Mabel illustrated how her household’s shift to predominantly Ukrainian-speaking deepened her sense of isolation and foreignness within her own space. Her lack of proficiency with translation technologies only heightened this disconnect, leaving her unsure of what was happening around her:

“They don’t speak English. Well, his wife does a little but not much... so... I tend to hear Ukrainian more than English, which can feel quite strange... like you’re in a foreign country because you don’t really know what’s going on around you sometimes... If I hear them talking loudly, I’m kind of left wondering ‘oh did they get bad news or something?’ [...] We chat using SayHi app, but I’m not brilliant at technology so it can be a real struggle”.

Some hosts experience a form of ‘culture shock’, coinciding with the process of home unmaking. First coined by Kalervo Oberg (1960), culture shock pertains to the psychological and emotional changes, including feelings of uncertainty, confusion and anxiety that an individual may experience when immersed in a culture distinct from their own. While traditionally associated with moving to a foreign country or returning home after an extended absence (‘reverse culture shock’), the concept also applies in the context of hosting, where the close proximity to unfamiliar traditions, practices, and beliefs can trigger similar reactions. Betty, for instance, described her personal struggles in adapting to what she perceived as her guests’ “outdated” gender norms:

“They’re very traditional people... they think it’s odd that my husband would do the cooking. Like they think I should be the one doing it [...] Sometimes, it feels as though I’m back living in 1980s Ireland [...] It can be a real shock to witness that in your own home”

Affective Relations – Familial Bonds & Conflicts

The quality of interpersonal relationships between host and guest also plays a critical role in shaping the experience of home. While strained relationships can contribute to the unmaking of the home, those that evolve into kinship ties can, conversely, facilitate its remaking. As Näre (2016) puts it, “care and by extension family relations is an important part of what constitutes a home” (cited in Paju et al., 2023: 5).

The formation of kinship bonds in hosting contexts has been well-documented in numerous studies over the last several years (see Baldassar, Ferrero, and Portis 2017; Boccagni 2018; Mogstad and Rabe 2022). An example from the present research is provided by Lucy (aged 43), who had been hosting an older woman named Anichka for nearly a year. Lucy’s home, previously an emotionally turbulent space following the death of her spouse—a form of home unmaking in its own right – became transformed into a more ‘homely’ environment through the development of their deep and affectionate bond, akin to a mother-daughter relationship. Lucy, for example, describes the nurturing ‘motherly’ practices that Anichka performed in the home daily:

“She can stay [forever] as far as I’m concerned, I just adore her... She’s basically like my mother [...] She looks after my house, she makes my bed... when I come home in the evening, she’s got delicious meals waiting for me. [...] Even like, I was sick a few weeks back and, she minded me and made me soup... Yeah... I’m just so lucky” (Interview transcript, 16th May, 2023).

Other acts of care further signified this bond and established the home as a space of shared belonging (Baldassar, Ferrero & Portis 2017). This included the renovation of an old bedroom into an art studio for Anichka, as well as the displaying of her paintings in various areas throughout the house. Additionally, it involved the mutual celebration of cultural rituals and life events (Stock 2019).

Séamus offers another poignant example of such relationships. With his own children grown and no longer living at home, he remarked how the presence of his guests transformed his ‘quiet’ and ‘lonely’ house into one of ‘happiness.’ He elaborated by discussing the intergenerational bond he had developed with the young boy, Igor, whom he affectionately described as ‘like a grandson.’ This connection was most evident in their frequent routines, from helping Igor with his homework to working together in the garden on weekends. However, Séamus’s experience was not without complexities. As previously noted, he also described how he was deeply affected by his guests’ struggles and the ongoing realities of war, which weighed heavily on his domestic life. This juxtaposition of emotional burden and happiness thus exemplifies the simultaneous processes of home remaking and unmaking (Baxter and Brickell 2014; Webber 2023), with his domestic environment becoming a space shaped both by the enrichment of new relationships and the effects of their own traumatic realities.

Monforte, Maestri, and d’Halluin (2021) explain that the experience of private hospitality is typically based on narratives surrounding love and family connections. As a result, there is often an expectation that guests show their hosts love and gratitude in response to the emotional investment they have shown

them. When such relationships fail to materialise, and guests do not reciprocate in this manner, hosts often experience disappointment and frustration which further escalates tensions within the household. This dynamic is vividly exemplified by Jane (aged 53), who hosted a couple for five months. Here, she highlights not only physical implications of hosting – giving up rooms of the house - but also the growing tension between family members arising from their relationships with the guests:

“I’ve heard lovely stories, so I thought it’d be the same... but there’s no appreciation... my son gave them his room so he’s been sleeping on the couch [...] They don’t want to partake in anything, they barely even talk to us [...] I’d be lying if I said it’s not causing problems...we’ve been sort of jumping down each other’s throats a bit because it’s getting too much ... My family really want them to go though. They’re done” (Interview Transcript, 18th May, 2023).

Reactions & Coping Mechanisms

Hosts respond to the strains of home unmaking in various ways, depending on the nature of the host-guest relationship. Most disruptions are managed or tolerated if a foundation of mutual affection exists between the host and guest (Monforte et al., 2021). However, when this bond is absent – and tensions do not resolve through the negotiation of boundaries - hosts are more likely to consider terminating the hosting agreement (Gunaratnam 2020). This is particularly true for those who feel their guests have “taken advantage” of them, illustrating how hosts continually reproduce “intimate bordering processes” within the domestic sphere to make distinctions between the “deserving” and “undeserving” refugee (Farahani 2021; *ibid*).

In other cases, when disruptions become too intense, hosts may demonstrate resistance by reducing their time within the home environment. This tendency is reminiscent, albeit in a milder form, of what Bertolani and Boccagni termed “opting out” – the conscious decision to distance oneself from one’s dwelling when it is believed to no longer fulfil the expectations of home (2021:64). One poignant example comes from Brendan (aged 64), who had been hosting two women and two boys for several months. In an attempt to escape his tense domestic atmosphere characterised by spatial restrictions and aspects of war, Brendan gradually started to spend most of his free time in the local pub or at his nephew’s house:

“I’d go there because I just couldn’t hack it anymore... to be in that environment, with everything all about the war [...] You just have to get out. There’s times you don’t really know what to be doing or where to be going” (Interview Transcript, May 16th, 2023).

Opting out, however, can also occur emotionally, manifesting as a significant loss of interest and disengagement from familiar homemaking practices. This was especially illustrated by Dolores:

“I’ve lost interest in doing different things around the house... I usually always have to be doing something [...] Just how I am... I don’t take the same interest anymore, not the way things are at the

minute anyway [...] Once we have our house back, things will go back to normal [...] I'll be doing some jobs around the house then"

Dolores's lack of engagement in her usual homemaking activities, and consequently, in aspects of her sense of self (Munro & Madigan 1999: 108), can be compared to findings in Parrott's (2005) study, where long-term patients in a psychiatric ward refrained from decorating their rooms because they did not perceive these spaces as proper homes, something they hoped to achieve at some point in the future, after their time in the ward (cited in Paju et al., 2023). In a somewhat parallel manner, Dolores viewed her home as something that is situated in the future, rather than in her present living condition, which she viewed as chaotic and unsettling.

Her future-oriented perspective was further highlighted by her plans to re-engage in particular homemaking practices once her guests have vacated, an event expected after a six-month period. By establishing this clear timeline for the hosting arrangement, Dolores - like many other hosts - created a coping mechanism for navigating the emotional complexities of home unmaking. Recognising the impermanence of her hosting arrangement allowed her to develop a framework that helps her reconcile the dissonance between her current reality and her envisioned domesticity.

Additionally, processes of home unmaking can also provoke counter-reactions, with some hosts actively engaging in new or different homemaking projects—either in their homes or elsewhere (Bertolani & Boccagni 2021). This aligns well with Handel's (2019) concept of active dwelling, which emphasises the performative nature of homemaking as a means of navigating and resisting the complexities of one's living situation. Mabel, for example, described how she began to "throw herself" into various gardening projects and decorating jobs around the house. This engagement not only allowed her to restore a sense of comfort and familiarity in her domestic space, but also served as a form of self-expression, helping her reclaim her identity amidst the disruptions brought about by hosting. As she put it, it's made things feel "that bit nicer... more normal".

Conclusion

This study has provided a nuanced examination of the multifaceted process of home unmaking experienced by Irish citizens hosting Ukrainian refugees. Through detailed ethnographic analysis, we have identified several key factors that contribute to this phenomenon. These include the pervasive impact of war-related realities and the liminal state of refugees, spatial, temporal, and social adjustments and restrictions within the domestic sphere, the integration of guests' personal and cultural identities into the host environment, and the complex affective dynamics characterising the host-guest relationship. As hosts navigate these changes, many experience significant stress, isolation, and a profound sense of alienation from their home environment. However, home unmaking is not a singular process. Rather, it unfolds alongside normative homemaking practices, with both processes influencing various dimensions of the home to different extents. Furthermore, home unmaking often works symbiotically

with processes of home remaking. This dynamic is particularly salient in instances where hosts develop kinship bonds with their guests or incorporate their guests' cultural traditions and rituals into their own domestic lives, enriching the domestic space with new meanings.

Hosts' responses to the challenges of home unmaking vary considerably, further highlighting the heterogeneity of hosting experiences. In situations where disruptions arise without the foundation of a strong host-guest bond, some hosts may opt to terminate the hosting agreement, thus exposing the underlying power dynamics and the implicit expectations of emotional reciprocity within the hosting sphere. Others, in contrast, may 'opt out' of their domestic environments, seeking refuge from the pressures by spending time elsewhere, and may engage in new homemaking practices, either within their existing space or in alternative locations, as a way of reasserting their sense of belonging and regaining control over aspects of their lives.

Given the complexity of these transformations, there is a pressing need for further research to delve deeper into these aspects. Longitudinal studies would be particularly beneficial in tracking the evolving experiences of hosts over an extended period, yielding valuable insights into the long-term domestic and social consequences of providing private hospitality. Such research should also account for the diverse experiences of individual household members, as home unmaking, homemaking, and remaking are rarely felt uniformly across all inhabitants. Differences in age, gender, personal responsibilities, and emotional investment can lead to varied perceptions of home and belonging, making it crucial to explore these dynamics in greater depth.

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CRAFTING IRISH AMERICA: THE BATTLE FOR FITZGERALD SQUARE

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Abstract: This paper will explore the reimagining of ethnic identity that took place following the renaming of Fitzgerald Square, a park named after Irish immigrant and Revolutionary War hero John Fitzgerald. Analysis of the event reveals the contemporary challenges to and understandings of Irish American ethnicity in the United States, and the ways in which the fear of erasure is utilised in the crafting of modern-day ethnic belonging. This paper serves to highlight the fact that ethnicity is dynamic and adaptable, and makes the case that ethnic identity is not passive, but always active and political.

Keywords: ethnicity, identity, Irish America, United States, Catholicism, fraternity, historical memory.

On March 17, 2018, Lieutenant Colonel John Fitzgerald's name was removed from Fitzgerald Square, a small park in the coastal town of Alexandria, Virginia. It was St. Patrick's Day, and many Irish American residents of Alexandria were eager to celebrate a local Irish hero, one who served in the American Revolutionary War. When the green-clad audience members gathered in the park on that chilly morning in March, they were dismayed to find that the man they had come to celebrate had vanished. In the early hours of the night the city of Alexandria had removed all traces of John Fitzgerald from Fitzgerald Square. In place of the former name, park signs simply read 'Waterfront Park.' Although the city claimed that Fitzgerald's name had simply been a placeholder until a more formalised naming process could be held, many Irish Americans felt that Fitzgerald's removal was an attack upon the ethnic identity of all Irish Americans. The controversy that followed extended far beyond the small park on the corner, earning the attention of the largest Irish American organisation in the United States: the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Almost overnight Fitzgerald Square became a battleground where the very definition of Irish American ethnicity would be challenged and recreated.

The controversy surrounding Fitzgerald's name and its removal allows for a critical examination of the narration of Irish American ethnic identity in contemporary U.S. society. The combination of the two seemingly disparate identities of 'Irish' and 'American' into a larger group ethnicity carries with it political, religious, and racial implications that have yet to be thoroughly examined among Irish Americans. In this regard, ethnic organisations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) exert profound influence over the definition of ethnic belonging. This paper will examine how ethnicity is narrated and redefined by the AOH, utilising the renaming of Fitzgerald Square as a case study in ethnic identity creation.

John Fitzgerald takes the role of the central figure in this controversy, both as an exemplar of Irish American belonging and as a hero that has been reimagined according to contemporary political understandings. Fitzgerald was one of the town's Revolutionary War heroes, a man who served under George Washington and who rallied residents of Alexandria to fend off a British surprise attack, saving the city (Alexandria Times 2018). After the Revolution he became a successful businessman, and funded the construction of many prominent buildings, including the local Catholic basilica. Fitzgerald was also an Irish immigrant, and his story holds special significance for many in the local Irish American community as a symbol of their historical legitimacy in the United States. His removal was a challenge to this understanding. For one aggrieved individual it was 'a slap in the face to all of us!' (Defend Irish Heritage 2018).

The local Alexandria chapter of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, just 11 years old, quickly mobilised to protest the removal of Fitzgerald's name. Although the local chapter is relatively small, it is part of a much larger U.S. organisation that claims more than 46,000 members across 46 states (About the AOH 2018). The national Ancient Order of Hibernians claims to be 'America's oldest Irish Catholic Fraternal Organization,' and was founded in 1836 in order to provide aid to newly arrived Irish immigrants to the United States. Today, it purports much larger goals 'such as; Immigration Reform; economic Incentives both here and in Ireland... Right-To-Life; and a peaceful and just solution to the issues that divide Ireland.' (About the AOH 2018). The national chapter published news of the controversy in their bimonthly newsletter, *The National Hibernian Digest* (Cosgrove 2018a), and began a petition that has over 1,500 signatures as of October 2018 (Defend Irish Heritage 2018). In doing so, they began a narrative of persecution and resilience that has attempted to redefine Irish American ethnicity in the 21 century in accordance with AOH understandings of belonging.

The AOH has a strict understanding of what it means to be Irish American. Members are no longer required to be immigrants, but they must meet several criteria to join. All members must be 'Irish, Catholic, and American' as well as the unspoken rule of fraternity—men (Home Page 2018). Fitzgerald's removal held significance for each of these identifications. As the local chapter leader Terry Riley observed, 'It's not just an Irish thing. It's not just an immigrant thing. It's not just a Catholic Church thing. This seems to hit every key element' (Schrott 2018). The Ancient Order of Hibernians, by bringing national attention to the story, is constructing an identity that is Irish, Catholic, American, and masculine, conflating these identities into one and claiming to fight on behalf of (and thus represent) all 'true' Irish Americans. It is an identity that is not solely national, racial, or religious; it is a combination of all of these categories. It is, in a word, ethnic.

Inventing Ethnicity

Fredrik Barth, in his seminal introduction to *On Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, challenges us to look at ethnicity as a relational rather than static identification (Barth 1969). If this is true, it should be possible

to examine the ways in which ethnicity is constructed in the face of controversy. Who controls the discourse surrounding Irish American ethnicity? What meanings are understood and created when demarcating ethnic boundaries? And how do instances of perceived aggression from the outside serve to challenge or solidify ethnic identity?

After German and African Americans, Irish Americans are the largest self-reported ethnic group in the United States. St. Patrick's Day parades around the country draw thousands to what has become the largest American 'ethnic' holiday (Hickman 1999: 183). March has been declared 'Irish Heritage Month' in the U.S. since 1991, and more Americans than ever before are 'rediscovering' their heritage by taking ancestry tours to Ireland (Wright 2007). Irish American identity is currently one of the most visible expressions of ethnic 'otherness' in the United States. And yet there is scarcely any scholarship examining the formation of Irish identity in the 21st century.

In the words of historian Timothy Meagher, 'Ethnic history, instead of moving forward to study American ethnic generations, has tended to move back into the European background of the migrants.' (2001: 392). This trend has led to a paucity of understanding of the ways that modern-day American ethnic groups construct and maintain their ethnic identities. It has also served to entrench our understanding of ethnicity in the sepia pages of national annals, as something stemming from 'time immemorial.' (Sollors 1989: xx). Instead, it may be useful to put aside for the moment the origins of individual ethnic group identity, and to examine the ways in which ethnicity is constructed in the present day.

The notion of ethnicity as timeless leads to the perception that ethnicity is unchanging and inherent. It paints the picture of social groups that are naturally separate based on kinship ties and cultural similarities. However, as Barth has observed, ethnicity is better described as the 'social organization of cultural difference.' (1994: 13). His definition challenges the idea that natural cultural variation makes up ethnicity. He instead emphasises the ways in which cultural differences are understood from within the group and without, as well as where and how group boundaries are demarcated. This definition foregrounds the socially constructed nature of ethnicity and challenges its reified place as identifier. This is not to say that ethnicity is not 'real,' indeed for members of any ethnic group this membership is 'not regard[ed] as negotiable.' (Cohen 2000: 5). The very existence of a distinct ethnic group relies upon the self-evident self-identification of its members. Recognising the modernity of ethnicity is instead to call for its re-examination along culturally and socially constructed lines.

Following in the tradition of Eric Hobsbawm (1983), Werner Sollors has suggested an examination of the social nature of ethnicity as 'invention.' (Sollors 1989). This means taking ethnicity not as a monolithic truth, but as something that is socially created and maintained over time. If he is correct, and ethnicity is invented, then it should be possible to examine this construction occurring in the present day. The Ancient Order of Hibernians, as the self-appointed defenders of Irish American ethnicity, are in

prime position to determine the markers of Irish American identity and also to establish the battlegrounds on which it can be challenged and built anew.

Inventing the Irish

The city council chamber was standing room only on September 12, 2018, the date of the Alexandria City Naming Committee Meeting (Schrott 2018). Shamrocks dotted almost every tie. Men in deep green blazers and women in mint dresses pressed tightly around the council table where three officials sat to hear community concerns. In attempting to placate the crowd, one city spokesperson took the opportunity to state, ‘Unfortunately, due to a complete coincidence, the groundbreaking was scheduled for as soon as possible and ... it turned out to be St. Patrick’s Day in March... It was a total coincidence, and I certainly apologise for not thinking of that when we scheduled the groundbreaking.’ (Ibid). The statement seemed to convey the city’s surprise that any members of the community would attach special meaning to Fitzgerald or his nation of origin. It reflected the popular view that Irish American identity is something to be donned once a year and then forgotten about, subsumed by an all-encompassing national American identity.

Sociologist Reginald Byron, in his study of Irish American identity in Albany, New York, comes to a conclusion about Irish American ethnicity that would be familiar to the surprised city officials. He concludes that due to its infrequent expressions, Irish identity is relatively unimportant in the contemporary identity of participants. Byron argues that, since arrival on American soil, each ‘succeeding generation has become more American and less Irish.’ (1999: 263). This popular assimilationist narrative has proven remarkably resilient despite the continued identification of millions of people across the United States as ethnically Irish American.

Our previous definition of ethnicity as the ‘social organization of cultural difference,’ (Barth 1994: 13), acknowledges the dynamic nature of ethnicity. It imagines ethnicity as the way that cultural difference is expressed or repressed in different circumstances. But this does not necessarily imply conscious choice. The potential for assimilation is not attainable for all ethnic groups. For nonwhite ethnic groups, the external perception of cultural difference imposes boundaries that are difficult to cross (Cohen 2000: 2). But Irishness in the United States, which is today ‘reliably, invariably, a form of whiteness’ (Negra 2006a: 1), is not as susceptible to external identification as are nonwhite groups. The unique position of Irish Americans as both white and ‘ethnic’ allows for scholars such as Byron to mistakenly dismiss it as ‘assimilated.’ When convenient, Irish American ethnicity is conformative and subtle within broader white American society, but this should not be mistaken for assimilation. To those outside its boundaries, the Irish markers of Irish Americans can appear to be fading, indeed almost invisible. However, as Alexandria’s city officials experienced, this identity can reappear with great ferocity when threatened.

For Irish Americans in Alexandria, Fitzgerald Square and St. Patrick's Day were vital signifiers of personal identity, albeit an identity only expressed on particular occasions, or behind the closed doors at the local Hibernian Hall. But Irish American ethnicity should not be seen as a spectrum, with members falling either more towards their Irish heritage or American nationality; rather, it is an identity of shifting loyalties and expressions that is present regardless of its visibility.

Byron's research is correct in observing that individual Irish Americans do not often mobilise on behalf of, or in defence of their ethnic identities. It is likely that the Fitzgerald Square protests would not have moved past the local level were it not for the intervention of the national branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. The national AOH publicised the controversy and encouraged its members to get involved (Cosgrove 2018a). According to local AOH chapter president Terry Riley, the removal of Fitzgerald's name was part of a larger trend. In his words, 'It seems to be lost in Alexandria history the thousands of Irish that immigrated to Alexandria who worked in the waterfront and throughout the city.' (St. Mary's Podcast 2018). National AOH Chairman Neil Cosgrove went even further, 'Not only should this name be restored, but an explanation given why the city of Alexandria wishes to engage in this... ethnic cleansing.' (Defend Irish Heritage 2018).

Cosgrove, as well as other commenters from the AOH, connected the removal of Fitzgerald's name with a movement of 'ethnic cleansing' against the Irish in America, one that hearkens back to a larger historical memory of Irish marginalisation (see, for example, Meagher 2001). They depict this removal as a threat to their Irish identity, and the possibility of its being erased. Ironically, it is this very narrative of erasure that may serve to solidify and reinvent the Irishness that the Ancient Order of Hibernians claim.

Francesca Cappelletto helps to explain the constructive power of the narrative through what she calls 'remembering behavior.' (2003: 242). She writes, 'narration and memory are themselves events, rather than merely descriptions of events.' (Ibid). In this way, the very process of remembering is an act of creation, rather than simply the retelling of an already existing identity. Fitzgerald's story was not selected at random by the AOH, but was a narrative crafted to convey Irish American resilience in the face of oppression. Fitzgerald's removal does work by suggesting an attack on contemporary Irish Americans and allowing space for a retelling of historical grievances. The 'remembering behavior' practised by the AOH allows for the recreation of a newly defined Irish American identity. Fitzgerald's place as a war hero, a Catholic, and an immigrant turned American citizen all have special significance for those with Irish ancestry. The AOH is able to emphasise these traits of Fitzgerald's to create and demarcate identity. If contemporary Irish American identity appears to be under assault, really it is under construction. This identity is specific and multifaceted, and Fitzgerald's Irishness alone is but one part of the AOH narrative. To examine the ethnicity that is being created, we must address the other 'key elements' at play.

Inventing Catholicism

Many who signed the Fitzgerald Square petition included the names of their ancestors who lived in Ireland, others listed their AOH chapter number, and still others left longer comments, explaining the need to preserve Fitzgerald Square in the face of anti-Irish discrimination. Various comments read, ‘I am signing to fight the anti Irish anti Catholic bigots,’ ‘We need to preserve our Irish Catholic heritage!’ and made points such as, ‘The Irish and Catholics were once the ones discriminated against.’ (Defend Irish Heritage 2018). These comments are also instances of identity building, both for commenters to identify themselves as Irish Americans, and for the definition of the term itself. These comments convey an understanding of the removal that goes beyond Irishness. The commenters make explicit that, in their eyes, Irish identity and Catholicism are conflated. To be Irish, in this sense, is to be Catholic.

This identification has obvious historical and political connections to religious belief in Ireland, where Catholicism was outlawed and Catholics were subject to oppression under British rule. Today, members of the AOH still hold many traditional Catholic beliefs—some of which have fallen out of favour in Ireland. This has caused many in the AOH to decry contemporary Irish legal decisions, most recently in the cases of gay marriage legalisation and the passage of abortion legislation in the Republic of Ireland (Walsh 2018).

Membership requirements further distance the AOH from contemporary Ireland. The AOH’s insistence that members must be both Irish and Catholic ignores the plurality of belief throughout the history of Ireland, not just in terms of Protestants and Catholics, but also for the pagan, Muslim, and Hindu populations, among others, who have made Ireland their home. Although this erasure of Irish plurality is not unique to the AOH, they have defined an Irish identity that is wholly their own. In doing so, they invent an Ireland that does not and has never existed. If, in the eyes of members of the AOH, to be Irish is to be Catholic, then the Irishness of the AOH is distinct from Ireland itself. The inextricable tie created between ancestral and religious identification affects the ways identity is expressed and the ways heroes are venerated.

John Fitzgerald’s Catholicism features prominently in the narrative of his life. Not only was he an Irish immigrant, he was also a successful merchant who used his wealth to build the Basilica of St. Mary’s, the first Catholic parish in Virginia (Alexandria Times 2018). St. Mary’s still stands today, and the church hosts a podcast where guests are invited to discuss news relevant to the Catholic community. Terry Riley, as AOH chapter president and guest of the podcast, left no doubt as to the religious importance of Fitzgerald’s removal. He stated, ‘[We] provide a strong group for men to join. Our culture’s under attack, we’re a strong Christian group.’ (St. Mary’s Podcast 2018). Riley’s identification of the AOH as ‘a strong Christian group’ in contrast to an Irish American group makes clear the ease with which membership shifts between national, historical, or religious identifications, depending on the circumstance. The various requirements of AOH membership bring multiple understandings of self

into play when ‘culture is under attack.’ Thus, the removal of Fitzgerald’s name may be significant due to his Irish background, his Catholic beliefs, or his American citizenship, but AOH leaders emphasise that an attack on any one category is an attack on all of them.

The mercurial nature of ethnicity as invention means that with each new battleground, historical remembering, and instance of identity reconstruction, a distinct sense of self is curated, one that links to the past, but is unique to the present and those who claim it. In this way the AOH is *not* working to create Irish ethnicity, or even Irish American ethnicity, but rather a distinct understanding of ethnic identification that incorporates religious, political, and historical understandings of self as attached to, and yet distinct from, any larger contemporary national identity.

Inventing America

Perhaps the single greatest endorsement of John Fitzgerald’s historical place as both an Irishman and an American comes from George Washington himself:

‘I shall now proceed to mention a person in whose skill and integrity ... I have the fullest confidence; a Gentleman who is a native of Ireland – Colo. John Fitzgerald. The active Services of this Gentleman during the War, his long residence in the Country and intermarriage in it... all entitle him to be considered as an American. The laws of this Country know no difference between him and a native of America.’ (George Washington, quoted in Lefkowitz 2018: 183).

George Washington’s statement has great symbolic importance for the AOH. Washington’s recognition of Fitzgerald confirms the place of Irish Americans at the beginning of U.S. history. Terry Riley emphasised this significance to Irish Americans that extended beyond Fitzgerald himself. He argued that the goal of the protests was ‘not just to recognise the contributions of Colonel Fitzgerald, but all the Irish who worked on the docks here.’ (Sullivan 2018). To erase Fitzgerald was to erase the Irish sense of belonging.

The city gave a number of official explanations for the name’s removal, the most common being that the park had never undergone an official naming process (Sullivan 2018), but it was the unofficial reason that many felt lay beneath the decision that caused the most controversy in the AOH, one that connected Fitzgerald to a much darker side of U.S. history. Throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries, the city of Alexandria, Virginia held one of the largest slave markets in the United States. At its peak, between 1828 and 1836 more than 10,000 enslaved African Americans were bought, sold, and housed in the city (Ibid). Fitzgerald, although not a slave trader himself, owned 14 slaves at the time of his death in 1799 (Ibid). Fitzgerald’s slave-owning past is often omitted from his history as a Revolutionary hero, but in the face of his removal, the AOH instead chose to centralise it.

City spokespersons acknowledged Fitzgerald's slave-owning past, but they emphasised that it was not a large factor in the park's renaming. 'Yes, we did receive complaints about slavery,' said one official, 'but that's a footnote, it's not the main story.' (Schrott 2018). For those who were opposed to the name change, the accusations were not so easily dismissed. To AOH Chairman Neil Cosgrove, Fitzgerald was a victim of prejudice masquerading as 'misguided political correctness.' (Cosgrove 2018a). In another article Cosgrove doubted that Fitzgerald owned slaves at all. He went so far as to claim that Fitzgerald's 'slaves' were, in fact, Irish immigrants whose voyage to the United States Fitzgerald had funded (Cosgrove 2018b). The article concludes, 'even long dead Irish immigrants deserve the presumption of innocence.' (Ibid).

Innocence, in this case, is directly tied to an understanding of Irish American ethnic identity. Census information confirms Fitzgerald's slaveholding past (as discussed in City of Alexandria, VA 2018), and yet for Cosgrove and the AOH, his innocence is not up for debate.ⁱ Rather than attempting to ignore the controversy, Cosgrove reframes it as yet another attack on the historically persecuted Irish. Victimhood and historical guilt, it seems, are incompatible. Once again, the challenge to Fitzgerald allows for the reconstruction of Irish American identity.

The presumption of innocence is one that is not granted to all people, but is instead a judgement of historical guilt and belonging. As Diane Negra reminds us, innocence is always political (Negra 2006b: 355). In her analysis of post-9/11 discussions of terrorism, Negra makes this point clear by examining the role of Irish Americans, who were visible as both firefighters and police, and played a large role in framing post-9/11 discourse as one of victimhood and righteousness (Ibid: 362).ⁱⁱ One online commenter illustrated this defence against accusations of slave holding: 'What we need to remember is all of the Irish that have been held in slavery,' (Deignan 2018). Instead of focusing on the slaveholding past of Fitzgerald, this comment seems to be saying, we should remember the oppression that Irish Americans faced. The battle over Fitzgerald Square casts Irish Americans squarely as the victims of history, a role that is contrasted with that of oppressor.

The fervour with which members of the AOH rushed to defend Fitzgerald's ethnic innocence is tied back to the racial whiteness of Irish Americans. The innocence of Irishness includes the perception that they were not participants in the U.S. history of slavery (see Gallagher 2003: 152). Without the protection of an Irish ethnic identity, Irish Americans would be subject to the same historical understanding of culpability as the rest of the 'non-ethnic' white population. Fitzgerald's innocence in the institution of slavery is important because it establishes the innocence of all those of Irish descent within the United States. To return to Byron's confusion regarding Irish 'assimilation,' the Irish ethnicity of Americans may be expressed rarely, and not seen as important in the day-to-day lives of individuals, but it is a central identity that gives those of Irish descent a unique and historically benign position within the American historical, political, and religious world.

The defence of Fitzgerald's slave ownership demonstrates how the AOH creates an Irish American history of victimhood, rather than culpability. This innocence carries both a notion of Irish ethnicity and a larger understanding of the United States itself. If, as according to the AOH, the Irish, as well as African, Asian, and Eastern European populations all experienced oppression, the success of Fitzgerald and contemporary Irish Americans seems to suggest that oppression is simply what one makes of it. The AOH, then, are not simply inventing Irish Americans, they are also inventing America. They are inventing an America where all populations experience oppression, belonging is earned, and guilt and victimhood are incompatible.

Conclusion

The hyphen is performative (Brody 2008: 85). It joins together two disparate ideas into one concept that totals more than its parts. In this sense Irish American identity, despite being written without, is a hyphenated ethnicity. The two words 'Irish' and 'American' when combined evoke an idea of belonging, one that is not disparate or divided, but whole. The hyphen performs by giving two words a broader meaning than they hold individually. They evoke new ideas. In the same way the Ancient Order of Hibernians adds the word 'Catholic,' while claiming to represent Irish Americans, there are numerous other identifications packaged within the seemingly simple two-word phrase. Similarly, the fraternal nature of the AOH means we could add the word 'men,' and popular discourse indicates we could add the word 'white,' all while maintaining the cohesion and comprehensibility of the phrase. Doubtless, there are numerous other words that the concept of 'Irish American' evokes, and yet it retains its ability to articulate meaning.

The meanings that are packaged within Irish American ethnicity are not inherent, nor are they timeless, they are invented, constructed, and maintained. Much of this work is done by individual narrative, but discourse is often directed from positions of power. The Ancient Order of Hibernians, by nature of its national prominence as an organisation of Irish Americans, is pivotal in the definition of Irish American ethnicity. The removal of John Fitzgerald from Fitzgerald Square need not have been a site of contention; it could easily have been the quiet renaming that the city of Alexandria intended. It was the selection of the event by the Ancient Order of Hibernians that established Fitzgerald Square as a battleground for the reshaping of ethnic identity. The exact markers of identity that the renaming process challenged were selected based upon AOH definitions of belonging. The result is an identity that is more than 'Irish, Catholic, American.' It is a political, racial, religious, and national understanding that redefines Irish American ethnicity in the contemporary world.

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Notes

ⁱ Although Ireland itself has a long tradition of anti-slavery (see Rodgers 2007), the complicity of some Irish Americans in the slave trade and upholding racial discrimination is undeniable (see Ignatiev 1995).

ⁱⁱ The equation of Irishness with nostalgia and historical innocence is currently on display at Ground Zero in the form of a model cottage from County Mayo (Negra 2006b: 366).

SEEKING THE SOUL: INNOVATION AND RETURNING TO TRADITION IN THE DANCE REPERTOIRE OF SIAMSA TÍRE

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Abstract: The focus in this article is the resilience of an embodied and evolving regional dance tradition, which reflects the factors that shape local cultures and communities. This paper examines how Siamsa Tíre, The National Folk Theatre of Ireland, has conserved and developed the North Kerry style of traditional step dancing, returning to the archives and retaining key elements of the dance style in an effort to maintain the soul of the tradition. Engaging in archival research, critical engagement with performances through ethnography, and ethnographic poetry, this article critically considers the steps as an embodied code that reflects the resilience of tradition and the meaning of the dance to the performers.

Keywords: Irish Dance; Folk Theatre; Ethnographic Poetry; Siamsa Tíre; Tradition.

Introduction

I first learned Irish step dancing from Patricia Hanafin in Tralee, Co. Kerry from the age of six. Unknown to me at the time, Hanafin had been a central figure in the development of Siamsa Tíre, being the secretary for its precursor Siamsóirí na Ríochta and later the first secretary of Siamsa Tíre when it was established as a company, acquiring the appellation ‘The National Folk Theatre of Ireland’ in 1974.ⁱ Hanafin encouraged me to audition for the company’s training centre, where she taught, and remained a central influence on my understanding of Irish dance. Amongst the steps that she taught me in the early 1990s was a version of ‘The Blackbird’ set dance performed by the company in the style of the North Kerry dancing master Jeremiah Molyneaux (1881–1965), better known as Munnix, which I would go on to perform with the company and in other contexts subsequently. In this paper, hornpipe steps and ‘The Blackbird’ set dance provide examples that facilitate an intertextual study of dance steps and a consideration of the role of a dance step, form and style in the identity of the company.ⁱⁱ

Tracing the story back to the early development of the company, I focus on the performances by Siamsa Tíre on a tour of the USA in 1976 and the production *Ding Dong Dederó*,ⁱⁱⁱ which premiered at the opening of the company’s theatre and arts centre in 1991. The original production, *Fadó Fadó* [Long, Long Ago] (1968), represents life and cultural practices in rural north Kerry in the early twentieth century and was developed by Artistic Director Pat Ahern (b.1932) with local performers. *Ding Dong Dederó*, also directed by Ahern, provides a narrative for the origins of the dance style through a focus on the life of Munnix featuring ‘The Blackbird’ step. Research on the history of the company (Kearney, 2013), in particular the 1976 tour (Kearney, 2019) and thematic material in various productions

(Kearney, 2016; 2017; 2021), prompted me to engage further with my own experiences. My involvement as a performer in *Ding Dong Dederó* and other productions as part of the company's summer seasons from the 1990s, which attract audiences largely comprised of tourists, raised questions regarding the development of a local culture for theatrical production and the impact of commerce and economics on the nature, aesthetics and sustainability of the tradition.

Examining and debating the balance between tradition and innovation is a recurring feature of scholarship and activity in Irish traditional music. In order to demonstrate the development and sustainability of the dance tradition through the work of Siamsa Tíre, I critically compare earlier productions by the company that I performed in, with newer projects and productions focusing on *rEvolution* (2005), *Turas* (2013) and *Anam* (2016), none of which I was involved in. In contrast with many of the company's projects, *rEvolution* was not initially devised as a performance piece but rather a project that involved the deconstruction of the Munnix dance style as a research and development exercise. Its title plays on the processes of evolution in the dance tradition. Translated as 'journey', *Turas* marks a change of direction for the company, focusing primarily on music and, in its original run, initially featuring mainly external performers rather than performers from the locality who had trained with the company. In contrast to most of the other productions by the company, the musicians were located on and dominated the main stage, while the dancing did not serve a narrative purpose. Although drawing on elements of the Siamsa Tíre repertoire, as well as archive footage, creating an intertextual dialogue, the show was a postmodern, post-*Riverdance* production. Translated as 'soul', *Anam* reflects a cyclical return to a focus on the solo dancer, featuring four dancers including one who performs in the Munnix dance style. To varying degrees, the productions reflect poet Ciarán Carson's assertion in relation to innovation in Irish traditional music that 'To know the way forward you must also know the way back' (1986: 55).

My approach is developed initially through reflective ethnographic poetry, which prompts questions and ideas. As Catherine Trundle and Susan Wardell note in a special issue of *Irish Journal of Anthropology* on creative ethnography: 'Ethnographers aim to understand life as lived, as poetry aims to evoke it' (2019: 238). Like these poet-scholars, the practice of writing poetry has allowed me to look again at the subject of my research. The writing of poetry distils my thoughts and creates images and ideas from which I can find meaning through my research (cf Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). Studying the work of other poets and critically reflecting on the language and metaphors I use influenced the further development of research questions and analysis.

There are further connections between poetry and dance. Writing about Irish poet Séamus Heaney, Eugene O'Brien (2011) argues that spoken poetry is the most embodied form of language. In turn, to represent dance, I represent steps as text. Poetic meters create rhythms, like the rhythms of the mnemonic devices used to remember steps, whereby the physical act of dancing is translated into words.

These words are also a form of notation and Samantha Jones (2021) demonstrates that this form of notation is an important element of Irish dance transmission and integrally linked to oral and kinaesthetic learning. Engaging with the work of the nineteenth-century poet Stéphane Mallarmé and focusing on his writings on dance, Mary Lewis Shaw (1988) notes similarities between dance and poetry as signifying systems but argues that the signs presented through dance are more open-ended.

In addition to these ethnographic reflections, I acknowledge that ‘the ethnographer’s *physical* experience of fieldwork music must have a pivotal role in his/her ethnography’ (Njaradi, 2013: 31; see also Sklar, 2000: 70; Melin, 2012). I trained and performed as a dancer with the company and these physical experiences inform my research (cf Barbour, 2011). Through further archival research and dance, the article acknowledges intertextuality in the work of Siamsa Tíre, focusing on the role and the recurrence of specific steps and references to the archives. Through an examination of the embodiment of tradition through dance and the ability to recognise the core elements and adaptations that engage with change and development in a traditional art, I demonstrate how these steps are part of the exploration of both tradition and innovation in the artistic development of the company and reflect the connectivity between the company and a wider artistic community, audiences and markets.

It is also important to consider the dances beyond the physical movements and understand the contexts and historical developments of the tradition. Ethnochoreologist Catherine Foley (2013) provides an earlier ethnographic engagement with the Munnix tradition than I, and has written about a number of aspects of the company. She notes her background outside this local tradition, encountering it in her role as a collector with expertise in a broader Irish culture and dance tradition. Her work is invaluable to me to understand the tradition in which I learned a generation later, when many of the older dancers had already passed away and I could only encounter them through the archives or their students and legacy. Like Foley, my research provides ‘insight into the movement system and into the community who practiced and observed it [...] an understanding of the ethno-aesthetic knowledge that governed the dancers’ conceptualization and practice of step dancing, as well as the cultural values held by the people of North Kerry, and how these values were embodied in performance’ (2012a: 27). She recognises that ‘each dance community performs, expresses and embodies a particular *habitus* which assists in both shaping and being shaped by step dancers and their practices’ (2013: 19–20). She also understands ‘practice’ as inclusive of ‘the doing, embodying and experiencing of step dance, be it in private or public spaces; the conceptualization of step dance by those who do it and observe it; the process involved in the creation, transmission, rehearsal and performance of step dance, be they formal or informal contexts; and the notion of practice or praxis as research’ (*ibid.*: 21). Critically she states:

Step dancing is not fixed or fossilized. It is an embodied, dynamic, dance-music cultural activity that is constantly undergoing transformation according to transformations and interactions in, and between, step dancers, musicians, history, culture and society. (*ibid.*: 21)

In this paper I engage with a dynamic, embodied tradition as I have experienced it through participation with and observation of the work of Siamsa Tíre. In particular, I consider the connection through dance to performers of previous generations and the factors that shape and influence change in a tradition, particularly when presented on a theatre stage or in contexts that differ greatly from the original habitus of the dancers.

Embodying Local Traditions

Inspired by stories I had heard as a boy and again while undertaking fieldwork examining the history of Siamsa Tíre, I composed a poem inspired by the stories of people like Jerry Nolan (1915–1984), Johnny McCarthy (1921–1991) and Seán Ahern and their performances on Broadway in 1976. ‘Tapping Tales’ reflects how dancers not only perform steps but embody local traditions. The North Kerry style of step dancing associated with Molyneaux is integral to productions by Siamsa Tíre. The productions distil the cultural heritage and folklore of Ireland, with a particular emphasis on the south-west of Ireland. In developing a form of folk theatre that incorporates dance, the company, led for over three decades by Ahern, explored the potential of the dance tradition in theatrical contexts. Early success for the company, which has its origins in community arts in the 1960s but is established and acquires the appellation ‘National Folk Theatre of Ireland’ in 1974, includes a tour to the USA in 1976 that included performances in several large theatres in the major cities.

Tapping Tales

*In the spotlight they tapped
Coded conversations
Inspired by the Eden they’d left behind
The artistry of a way of life
Alien to this orchard but
The audience appreciated the taste.*

*Eating and drinking this foreign fruit
Served as a reminder of Eve’s apple
The audience were banished from Eden but
Could glimpse at the simple wonders wrought in time
The tip tapping toes telling
The stories of old.*

*Unaccustomed to acclaim
The dancer bowed and left
Never meeting the friends he believed he had
So far away from home
Who enthusiastically applaud the poetry of
His elaborate writings on the floor.*

The dances performed by Nolan and McCarthy were not developed for the stage but were already part of a local tradition, which was part of the intangible cultural heritage of rural North Kerry for over a century. This milieu is vastly different from New York, ‘the Big Apple’. Despite a large Irish diaspora in New York and other cities visited, the audience was not primarily made up of Irish Americans. Indeed,

Irish Americans may have had a different preconception of Irish culture, as reflected in newspaper reviews of the time (Kearney, 2019). Siamsa Tíre did not change their production for their audiences in the USA, presenting Irish language song and a local style of step dance and received largely positive press and attracted significant audiences. Despite financial support from the Government of Ireland and positive reviews, the tour was a significant financial challenge for the company, who did not engage in a tour of this scale subsequently. The majority of the cast returned to their jobs (or school in the case of the children) rather than professional careers in the theatre. Most continued to perform with Siamsa Tíre, primarily in Kerry, and continued to participate in cultural activities locally in the community.

‘Tapping Tales’ draws on other stories from my experience of the tradition, including a line in a show I performed in as a boy in the Siamsa Tíre training centre about Munnix: ‘he would write on the floor with his feet’. These ‘writings on the floor’ form a text that I wish to examine but also reflect a broader story about dance in North Kerry and its transformation in theatrical contexts. The recurrence of Nolan’s ‘writings on the floor’, not just as physical steps but in their cultural context and meaning for the identity and development of the theatre company represents both the survival and adaptation of local culture.

In a podcast produced by Siamsa Tíre (Barry, 2021a), Artistic Director of the company Jonathan Kelliher highlighted the importance of the Munnix style of dance to him and the work of the company. He described it as ‘Part of me and who I am’. He noted that, when teaching, he notes the lineage of learning; Jonathan learned his dancing primarily from Jimmy Hickey, who in turn learned from Liam Dineen, who was a pupil of Munnix, after whom the dance style is named. Kelliher noted the extension of the dance tradition beyond that, as also documented by Foley (2012b; 2013; 2015a). I too am part of that lineage, learning initially from Patricia Hanafin but later from Kelliher. Hanafin knew Liam Dineen but was taught dancing primarily by Irene Gould, who had been a pupil of another Munnix pupil, Phil Cahill. Gould brought Hanafin and others to learn steps from Cahill.^{iv} Hanafin was the initial choreographer with Siamsóirí na Ríochta, the group that developed to become Siamsa Tíre, and is listed as the choreographer for the Broadway performances (Siamsa Tíre, 1976; IBDB, n.d.). Within that production, individual dancers including Nolan and McCarthy, danced the steps that they had learned in the tradition, in a manner that reflected the context for performance in their native, rural North Kerry.

My involvement in this community affects my understanding and my methodological approach. In developing this research, I engage in the practice of dance, re-performing the steps as I learned them in the community and performed with the company and theorise on the meaning of this practice. It was from Hanafin that I first learned a version of the set dance ‘The Blackbird’ in the Munnix style, an important embodied text in the context of this paper. My analysis is informed, in part, by the parameters outlined by Foley (2010: 57) that ‘include concepts of timing, execution, carriage and steps’, and an understanding of terminology in Irish dancing (Ní Bhriain, 2008). As well as observing and reading, I can feel the intertextuality through ‘physical thinking’ (Albright, 2010: 101) and my performance of

embodied texts. My approach treats dance steps as intertextual texts for analysis but is extended by my own somatic and visceral knowledge of how it feels to perform them, essentially marking a sort of embodied aesthetic of traditionality. In addition to writing about meaning, I also discuss the translational aspects of embodied knowledge in text form. This is further augmented by my use of poetry to communicate insights. The steps also reflect the resilience of elements of the culture across generations and changes in the dance tradition reflect broader social and cultural change. Siamsa Tíre has continued to embody a local tradition through its use of dance steps whilst engaging with collaborators and other styles to develop new artistic expression through dance that reflects developments in Irish society and Irish cultural expression. The physical moves create a bond between members of a community across generations.

Conserving or Selling the Blackbird?

Like many regional variants in Irish traditional music, the survival of the Munnix dance tradition was challenged by changes in culture, technology and taste in the latter half of the twentieth century. Reflecting on the development of the company, Foley identified Siamsa ‘as a regional response to developing cultural tourism and as a national response to processes of modernity and globalization’ (2013: 24). Ahern lamented changes in his native place that were impacting on the intangible cultural heritage. These changes ranged from farming methods such as the use of the implements such as the flail to thresh corn and churn to make butter, to the use of the Irish language and the various traditional worksongs that linked the two. By creating performances that represented these cultural practices on stage through the use of music, song, dance and mime, Ahern was preserving a memory of a way of life and educating performers and audiences about folklife and folkways (see also Kearney, 2013).

While the dancers in the 1976 production were not professional performers, they spearheaded the ongoing development of Siamsa Tíre as a professional and semi-professional theatre company, which required significant funding to sustain itself over the next fifty years. The original cast brought their talents to the community company that developed under the direction of Ahern. Together they devised short pieces that were combined to create longer productions such as *Fadó Fadó*. Cast members contributed ideas, steps and tunes while Ahern made choral arrangements of traditional Irish language songs and sought to create archival recordings of the local cultural heritage. The early success of the company attracted the support of tourism stakeholders and from 1968 the company performed throughout the summer in Tralee and other locations.

By the time that Siamsa Tíre appeared on the Broadway stage in 1976, it had been established as a company and was welcoming tourists to view its production in Kerry. Irish traditional music, song and dance was already established as a globally performed culture (Motherway, 2013; Kearney, 2019) that had experienced considerable change and innovation (Hall, 1997; Brennan, 1999; Ó Cinnéide, 2001) and was an important part of the tourist experience in Ireland (Cronin and O’Connor, 2003). In her study

of cultural tourism, Foley concludes that ‘Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland, is a tourist destination...[s]haped by tourist expectations, modern aesthetics, a desire to maintain cultural heritage, and economic need’ (2015b: 157). This narrow observation does not consider the broader artistic contribution of Siamsa Tíre to dance and theatre in Ireland but does underline the dependence of the company on tourism. The development of a core company in 1985 signalled the beginning of greater engagement with artistic development, particularly in the area of dance (Phelan, 2014). They collaborated with choreographers and composers beyond the company and began performing at national and international events such as the Dublin Theatre Festival (Mulrooney, 2006). The focus on tourism audiences sometimes diminishes an appreciation of Siamsa Tíre’s innovation and artistic development and it is important to acknowledge the projects and productions that seek to explore dance and theatre without a perceived need to entertain a tourism audience. However, until 2019 when the impact of COVID-19 led to the cancellation of the summer season, tourism was an integral part of the business model for the company.

Tourism presents both challenges and opportunities for artistic groups and the interpretation of cultural displays for tourists is examined in the work of Edward Bruner (2005) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998). Performing for tourists requires significant resources and the performances consist of a regular repetition of familiar repertoire based on established themes rather than constantly changing, innovative productions. Nevertheless, Siamsa Tíre’s very popular ‘summer season’ performances are a window behind which the company maintains a training programme for young performers and engages in the development of new work. The popularity of these summer performances is also integral to funding the company. As ethnomusicologist Chris Smith (2006: 9) notes: ‘No one can work in this field, as I have, without coming to understand that there has long been conflict between commodification and community in the practice and the handing on of traditional music’. The artistic and economic challenges are reflected in my poetic response through the bell and the blackbird. The bell represents the markets and the need to maintain economic stability, including engaging with tourism. The blackbird represents a link to the local traditions and community from which the artistic practice emanated. The bell may also represent innovation while ‘The Blackbird’ is also part of the repertoire, identified by Foley (2013) as a kinaesthetic marker of the company.

Follow the Blackbird

*Standing at the crossroads I hear the blackbird and the bell.
No more the peal of church bells but the bankers' Wall Street wailing.
Mammon's melody.*

*The blackbird sings a sweeter tune and sings it oh so well.
No more the sounds of hedgerows but Mother Nature softly calling;
A hopeful melody.*

*I try to sing the tune I know above the ringing bell.
Evermore the sound of life, I hear my calling through the wailing.*

My inner melody.

*I listen to the blackbird and at once my fears dispel.
No more the noise of tension I find my music in the dawning -
In chorus. My melody.*

*At each new junction I can hear the blackbird and the bell.
I listen to the blackbird but I also hear the bell.*

The imagery and metaphors are influenced in part by the North Kerry philosopher, John Moriarty (1938–2007), a neighbour of and influence on Ahern. As well as his writings, Moriarty presented a programme on the Irish national broadcaster in 1997 entitled *The Blackbird and the Bell* and became the focus of a production by Siamsa Tíre in 2009 entitled *Moriarty*. My poem reflects some of the motives behind the initial development of the company in response to changes in rural Ireland in the latter half of the twentieth century and the sustainability challenges faced by the artistic company. In this poem, the blackbird is both the step and the aspects of nature and culture that is affected by factors including economics and globalisation.

The global success of *Riverdance* and other Irish dance productions from the late 1990s creates a new lens through which to consider Siamsa Tíre. *Irish Times* dance critic Michael Seavor argued that Siamsa Tíre reflected the rural past while *Riverdance* represented urban contemporary but when Seavor (2008: 3) suggests that ‘*Riverdance* and its spin-offs brought globalization to Irish dance’, he is betraying a lack of critical engagement with globalisation forces that were, by then, already evident in Irish dance. This is despite Seavor’s own acknowledgement that ‘the first wave of globalization is considered to have taken place from 1870 to 1913’ (2008: 4). Reflecting on Irish dance in the aftermath of *Riverdance*, Wulf notes how:

Irish dance has also toured and travelled for a long time. This mobility has increased recently and accelerated into webs of regional, national and global movements, enhanced and connected by media and new technology. (2005: 59)

The perceived opportunity to capitalise on the interest in dance productions in the wake of *Riverdance* is evidenced by the development of other productions in the county in competition with Siamsa Tíre. These include *To Dance on the Moon* (2000), produced by Ceol Chiarraí and performed initially at the INEC Killarney, before later being based at a new theatre in Ballybunion, and *Celtic Steps* (2012), co-directed by Sean Murphy and David Rea and also based in Killarney. These productions do not develop the broader theatrical approach of Siamsa Tíre but rather focus on contemporary presentation of postmodern, post-*Riverdance* Irish dancing.

The approach taken by Siamsa Tíre is a conscious one. In response to questions arising from the commercial success of *Riverdance*, the former General Manager of the company Martin Whelan indicated to researcher Barra Ó Cinnéide that Siamsa Tíre would not aim to ‘duplicate the success of

“Riverdance” and instead ‘remain small’ (2001: 51). Despite the economic demands represented by the bell, Siamsa Tíre have maintained a focus on local activities, traditions and themes, even after the global success of *Riverdance* and the aesthetic that it developed (Ó Cinnéide, 2001). It is evident from my own experience in the community that not everybody was satisfied with these decisions and some artists who were trained by and gained experience with Siamsa Tíre have also sought employment with more commercial productions, in some instances also remaining part of the cast of Siamsa Tíre and returning to perform at different times. The wheel has come full circle as the increased interest in Irish dancing globally has led people to engage more with local dance traditions, such as those of Munnix in North Kerry, and these steps have gained acceptance in competition (Foley, 2019). This discussion follows the blackbird, demonstrating its resilience as it is reimagined by the performers of Siamsa Tíre.

Finding the Blackbird

In a 2021 video project, Siamsa Tíre’s Artistic Director Jonathan Kelliher asserts that the version of ‘The Munnix Blackbird’ used by the company was choreographed by members of the professional core company in 1990. They drew upon archival footage of older North Kerry dancers, utilising steps and motifs, to create the dance which became the centre piece of *Ding Dong Dederó*. The assertion that the company choreographed this step conflicts with memories of some older members who believe that the step was danced prior to 1990, and the writings of ethnochoreologist Catherine Foley who collected this and other versions of ‘The Blackbird’ from older dancers in the region in the 1970s. It is important to note that Munnix developed many different versions of steps, some of which were almost certainly changed or adapted by his pupils based on abilities and artistic preferences. Whatever the origins, the version performed by the company today, and which I learned from Patricia Hanafin in the early 1990s, may be represented in text as:

Tip and tip batter jump bang, bang
 Jump out, jump batter hop kick out
 Jump heel step toe bang kick up,
 Jump heel heel click down
 Tip batter hop back two three
 Step bang, kick and toe heel bang
 Kick out heel, one two and tip batter hop back.

Tip and tip and drum, toe step heel step one two swing out swing in
 Tip and tip two three, jump two three jump heel heel click down and
 Tip and drum and drum batter hop rock two down batter hop rock two
 Step bang, kick out heel, jump and drum bang
 Tip batter hop back, tip and tip toe step heel step one two
 Kick hop heel heel click down batter hop toe bang, toe bang
 Tip and drum and drum one two
 swing out swing back kick hop heel heel click down
 Tip and drum batter hop back.

While this text represents the movements, its interpretation requires prior knowledge of the dance style. Additional annotations, such as reference to the leg on which the movement is performed, may be

indicated but to do so would take from the rhythmic aspects of the ‘poem’, which may be recited in time with the music. It is important to understand other aspects of movement that include the twist or swivel on the heel, the arch of the raised leg which does not extend high into the air, and the grounded nature of the ‘drum’. It is a relaxed, close-to-the-floor style of dance that does not require a large space, the practice of step dancing on a half-door laid out on an uneven floor reflected in the old saying, ‘he could dance on a sixpence’ (see also, Brennan, 1999). Dancer Paddy White, who was an important influence on Ahern and the early company dancers, noted on a video made by Ahern in the Siamsa Tíre archives: ‘you’ll show a person a step, and you’ll show it t’em the real way, but it can be danced a different way to put style into it [...] to put style into it is a different thing than to learn a step’.

My first performance in the Siamsa Tíre Theatre and Arts Centre was in *Ding Dong Dederó*, subtitled ‘Forging the Dance’, in 1994. I had trained for three years in the Teach Siamsa Training Centre in Finuge, performing the role of Munnix, a blacksmith’s son, in my final year. Like many others who sought to perform with the company, I felt great pride in achieving my goals, which expanded as I found my place within the community and gained the opportunity to perform larger and more difficult roles. I was often nervous, none more so than on my first night performing in the theatre in Tralee.

Forging the Dance

*Like an earthquake, the set shook
Caused by the uncontrollable tremble in my leg
As nerves and excitement swelled
In the near silent darkness.*

*The tape plays a welcome and
The blacksmith's hammer suddenly strikes the anvil
Creating a murmur amongst the watchers
As I ease into prescribed movement,*

*Sounding out 'ding' and 'dong',
My unbroken voice not yet capable of reaching
The manly depths of my co-conspirators
Whom I join in primitive dance.*

*Debut complete I watch on
From the wings with wonder
Enthralled by the actors transformed and transforming
My understanding, my future, the dance.*

*I return to learn the dance
Forged on this stage and restored in each performance
Nerves banished by the community
As I find my mark.*

I returned to Finuge for the summer performances after the completion of my training to reprise the role of Munnix and would also travel to the Carraig training centre to perform the role and perform as a musician. *Ding Dong Dederó* presented the story of Munnix in a more complete and stylised form but continued, in the second act, to explore the choreographic potential of the dance, incorporating elements

of contemporary dance, ‘forged’ in collaboration with external choreographers (see also Phelan, 2014). In my later teens I learned and performed these dances that had enthralled me as a young dancer whose training was essentially in traditional Irish dance. While I was engaged in a semi-professional manner with the company, the community aspect was always important. When I left for university and later employment, I continued to perform and sometimes teach the steps, tunes and songs in other contexts as part of the wider Irish traditional music community. Away from Kerry, there was curiosity amongst other dancers and audiences about my style of dance.

Gradually my involvement with the company lessened until I took my seat as an audience member. The excitement I felt in the auditorium as the lights dimmed was very different to that which I had experienced standing on the stage two decades previously. Attending different productions, I could still trace the sources of the creative process and recognise the steps and embodied traditions of the company. Although elements remain, the dance continues to be forged anew, often returning to the archives and sources before exploring new possibilities.

Forging the Dance: Authenticity, Creativity and Reworking

While the early productions by Siamsóirí na Ríochta and Siamsa Tíre were innovative in their time, developments in the 1980s gave rise to increased exploration of the choreographic potential of the dance form. The reworking of local traditions by the company can be considered as part of what geographer Doreen Massey terms ‘a progressive sense of place’ (1991, 1994). If, as Trachsel (1995: 45) suggests, authenticity is found in ‘historical process’, as old material is reinterpreted for performance and social communication, debates and controversies about Irish traditional music help authenticate that music. The concept of authenticity is not dependent only on its interpretation as a reproduction of the past and Vallely (2005) underpins some of the contested narratives that emerge in relation to the development of Irish dance. Changing contexts for dance traditions, the reworking of and return to traditional steps, and the evocation of a regional narrative contribute to the resilience of the culture performed by Siamsa Tíre while simultaneously leading to contested narratives of Irish dance.

The impact of a focus on the local or the idealization of place can lead to the romanticization of the local as authentic (Biddle and Knights, 2016: 3). A focus on tradition, may also suggest a conservative mindset or approach. However, reflecting on her fieldwork in North Kerry in the 1980s, Foley states that the dance tradition was creative and dynamic (2020: 5). As Ahern sought to bring these local traditions into the theatre, he embraced the creative potential of both the dance and theatre, pre-empting McGrath’s assertion that dance theatre is a ‘vital site of innovation and transformation in the Irish performance landscape’ in the twenty-first century (2013: 1).^v This creativity remains central to Siamsa Tíre, which has been described as ‘the most traditional and, at the same time, original Irish theatre performance of which music and dance are an integral part’ (Swift and Morash, 2013). It is necessary, as Guy Beiner notes in a consideration of Irish song traditions, to consider ‘tradition’ not as a fixed entity

but subject to the dynamics of change and continuity (2003: 174). Siamsa Tíre, through the medium of theatre, reflect a tradition that responds to the present and, in some ways, pre-empt the future, while conserving and sustaining aspects of the intangible cultural heritage of the region's past. As choreographer Mary Nunan noted to anthropologist Helena Wulff in relation to the development of *Clann Lir* (1997), the company remained protective of their dance style (Wulff, 2007: 28). I have chosen three productions that exemplify this, but such a reading of the company's repertoire could be expanded to include many others if not all of the company's productions.

Ding Dong Dederó was preceded by *Idir Eatarthu* (1990) and followed by *The Seville Suite* (1992), dances to compositions by Irish composers Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin and Bill Whelan respectively. While *Idir Eatarthu* explored the potential in collaboration between Irish and Contemporary dance, *The Seville Suite* juxtaposed Irish and Flamenco dance. In both instances, the Munnix style of step dance integral to the company's identity is evident. Both pieces are short but the process informs further productions, notably *Clann Lir*. In seeking to represent the Irish legend, the production focuses on four characters, children who are turned into swans. The four dancers performing the roles of the swans occupy most of the time on stage. Their bodies reflect an engagement with contemporary dance but their steps are unmistakably of the Munnix tradition (see also, Mulrooney, 2006; Wulff, 2007; Seavor, 2008; Phelan, 2014). *Clann Lir* became an established production in the summer season repertoire for the subsequent two decades but was also acclaimed by dance critics in Ireland (see Swift, 1999), an important acknowledgement for the company that drew attention to the metaphorical blackbird.

The Blackbird's Evolution – *rEvolution* and *Turas*

The 'Munnix Blackbird' that featured in *Ding Dong Dederó* was the starting point for the multidisciplinary project *rEvolution*, which began as a research project in 2003 and attracted Siamsa Tíre's first Arts Council support for performance.^{vi} Choreographer Cindy Cummings and visual artist Andrew Duggan collaborated with a small group of Siamsa dancers led by then company Dance Master Jonathan Kelliher to deconstruct the dance steps to elements (Mulrooney, 2006; Cronin, 2018). The dance steps were deconstructed into mnemonic devices, similar to those I have utilised in my research. The success of the initial project led to further development and a second Arts Council grant facilitated the ongoing evolution of the material and methodologies into a performance at the 2005 Dublin Fringe Festival (Seavor, 2005). Contemporary dance specialist Cummings had previously worked with the company on their 2003 production *Oiléan* (see Kearney, 2013), and had developed an appreciation of the Munnix style through working with the company (Barry, 2021b).

While the project attracted interest and positive reviews (Foley, 2013), Hurley highlighted the challenge of incorporating this material and approach back into the company's main body of work (Seavor, 2005). Former General Manager, Marianne Kennedy, noted the challenge of understanding the work of the company beyond the expansion of the summer season repertoire and needing to appreciate the

company's engagement in artistic development processes (Barry, 2021c). *rEvolution* was not intended to be part of the regular repertoire of the company but contributed to the continuing professional development of the core company, the small professional group of performers whose responsibilities included teaching and preparing the community cast for larger productions. While watching *rEvolution*, Foley (2013: 206) wonders how the older generation of dancers from whom she collected would respond to contemporary interpretations of their dance practice. Critically, the embodied tradition that they handed on continues to be quoted and referenced.

Through the use of AV technology, footage of some of these older dancers is featured in *Turas* (2013), which provides more conservative references to the company's past repertoire for a wider audience. The first Act ended with the male dancer bringing on stage the half door, an intertextual reference that made a particular connection on the night with many of the audience able to relate to a scene from *Fadó Fadó*, the original Siamsa Tíre production. Reflective of one aspect of the Munnix and other old Irish dance traditions, the short scene cleverly introduced ideas of dancing on a barrel and the ultimate recognition of a dancer's skill, dancing on a sixpence. Intertextual reference was also evident in the performance of 'Iníon an Fhaoit ón nGleann' both vocally and on the fiddle, which was the climax of *Ding Dong Dederó*.^{vii} This segment was complemented by archival footage of now deceased dancers performing in 1974 at the Teach Siamsa in Finuge and followed by a performance of 'The Blackbird' by the male dancer. The performance began with some stylistic awareness but engaged in sharp movements more akin to contemporary competitive dance forms in contrast with the fluidity of the older dancers. The dance cast in the production were technically accomplished, highly educated and successful in competition but not all had trained with the company or in the tradition and there was an emphasis on contemporary styles and choreographic practice in Irish step dance that contrasted with the company's stated emphasis on the Munnix tradition. Thus, the dance is shaped once again in interpretation as the text becomes embodied by another generation and the boundaries between old and new styles are blurred.

Widening the Road

While *rEvolution* and *Turas* reflect attempts to present contemporary representations of tradition, they also return to archival sources for inspiration. Reflecting on the importance of the training centres, central to Ahern's vision and outlined in an unpublished plan for the company (Ahern and O'Sullivan, 1972), I composed a poem entitled 'Widening the Road' inspired by research into the dancer Liam Tarrant (1921–1974), a close friend of Ahern and a pupil of Munnix who died at the opening of the training centre in west Kerry. The final two stanzas read:

*That tradition's roads are often left
Forgotten in the rush
To find a new direction
That leaves them out of touch*

*So focused on the road ahead
We miss things we leave behind
Sometimes we need to press the brakes
For we cannot press rewind.*

The production *Anam*, first staged in 2016, reflects Siamsa Tíre's onward journey but with evidence of greater reflection on the Munnix tradition of dance. Rather than focusing solely on this local tradition, the production features four male solo dancers, each performing a different style of traditional percussive step dance: Munnix (Jonathan Kelliher), competitive Irish dance (John Fitzgerald), Appalachian Flatfoot (Matthew Olwell) and Ottawa Valley (Nathan Pilatzke). I attended a preview of *Anam* in Siamsa Tíre on 22 April 2016, prior to the premiere at the Dublin Dance Festival the following week. Based on a concept by Kelliher, formerly the Dance Master and now Artistic Director of the company, the production did not feature the community company of Siamsa Tíre but rather, like *Turas*, a number of external performers. However, Kelliher and Fitzgerald had both received training in the training centres at Finuge and Carraig respectively before becoming members of the Siamsa Tíre community cast and later professional core company. Unlike *Turas*, in which there was a blurring or ambiguity between traditional and contemporary step dance styles, *Anam* presented a clear juxtaposition between the styles.

While visually interesting, it was rhythm that was the foundation for the collaboration in *Anam*. The four styles of dance were both allowed space to exist separately and coexist but rather than present four dancers who had learned to imitate each other's styles, the dancers maintained their individual physical identity while creating shared rhythms. While fusion is often spoken about in terms of bringing together musical styles in Irish traditional music, in the programme for *Anam* (Siamsa Tíre, 2016) Kelliher states that the motivation relates more to interaction, perhaps reflecting the approach previously undertaken with *The Seville Suite* (1992), in which Michael Murphy of Siamsa Tíre danced opposite Flamenco dancer María Pagés. Often in the production, the dancers' identities were clear through the myriad of embodied shapes that each dancer would create to achieve their personal style. Throughout the performance there was implicit and explicit reference to both tradition and innovation in dance traditions as realised by the individuals involved in the production.

The theatrical experience and the audience's perception of the identities of the dancers was shaped by the use of audio-visual projections, mostly using archival video footage and old photographs, often with elements of both humour and poignancy. The opening and unexpected video was from the archives of Siamsa Tíre. The dancer, co-director Kelliher, mirrored the dancing of the late Jack Lyons while his voiceover told the story of his connection with this old, regional dance tradition, tracing it back to Munnix.^{viii} There was respectful reference to the past that set a tone and context for the development of the production. While the videos of the three other dancers made references to success in the form of prizes and global performances with groups such as the Chieftains and Riverdance, Kelliher's video

rejected these signifiers of success allowing the audience to judge for themselves the merits of his style, a facet of dance emphasised by the late Paddy White in archival footage. *Anam* places the Munnix style of dance from North Kerry within a global context and an increasingly globalised market-place and takes pride from the richness of that tradition.

Conclusion

Growing up in Kerry in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a sense of honour being selected to train and perform with Siamsa Tíre. My journey began prior to my selection, through music and dance lessons. My education in Siamsa Tíre had an implicit engagement with local traditions and brought me under the influence of older generations of performers. These performers were not only custodians of a tradition but innovators who brought these traditions into a theatre space and explored the potential of dance as an expression of local identity. My summer employment as a teenager was effectively performing for tourists. This afforded me the time to engage more thoroughly with the arts and helped sustain a community of performers whose repertoire could include material drawn from archival sources or passed down from previous generations.

As Artistic Director, Pat Ahern recognised the importance of recording the older dancers and preserving knowledge of their embodied traditions. When Siamsa Tíre moved beyond the conservative performance of steps and engaged in a different approach that involved collaboration with artists from other dance forms, exemplified by *Ding Dong Dederó* and *Clann Lir*, there is again a sense of getting to know a local culture but from a different perspective, and in the process developing a new appreciation for the importance and value of these local traditions in a global context.

rEvolution, *Turas* and *Anam* reflect a return to the archives for inspiration but demonstrate different contexts for performances and approaches to developing a production. *rEvolution* is explicitly a research piece that has a niche audience and involved the professional core company of Siamsa Tíre working with an external choreographer and visual artist. *Turas* is a larger scale production that targets a weekend tourist market and employs professional performers, a significant number of whom were, at least initially, employed from outside of the company's community cast or core company, although this is not clear to those attending the 'Siamsa Tíre' production. *Anam* is similar to *Turas* in scale but features a dancer explicitly representing the traditions embodied by Siamsa Tíre collaborating with external performers without ambiguity of identity. *rEvolution* incorporates elements of the Munnix dance tradition through the embodiment of steps, elements and motifs, which are broken down and deconstructed. *Turas* and *Anam* also incorporate this embodied tradition but in a more complete form, augmented with audiovisual footage from the archives of the company. Each production 'follows the blackbird', seeking to find the soul in the tradition through engagement with archival sources and, at the same time 'widen the road' through innovation and development.

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Notes:

- ⁱ Siamsóirí na Ríochta translates as ‘entertainers of the kingdom’, a reference to Co. Kerry and Siamsa Tíre translates as ‘entertainment of the land’.
- ⁱⁱ Irish step dancing comprises a number of dances based on traditional rhythms. The most popular rhythms are the jig, reel and hornpipe and each dance comprises of ‘steps’, which can be further broken down into motifs. These steps can be danced to any melody conforming to a standard structure in that rhythm. A set dance differs from other step dances in that the step is composed to the structure of each particular melody, which does not follow a standard pattern. A longer definition of a set dance may be found in Ní Bhriain (2008) and examples of forty set dances are examined with notes on their historical significance in Ní Bhriain and McCabe (2018).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Borrowing from the title of a song, these words are an onomatopoeic reference to the sounds of work in a blacksmith’s forge and do not translate.
- ^{iv} Foley (2013) provides information on dancing teachers in North Kerry and their lineage. Information on Hanafin is augmented by personal communication and conversations with the author.
- ^v McGrath does recognise the collaboration between dancers from Siamsa Tíre with a variety of contemporary dance choreographers including Mary Nunan, Cindy Cummings and Fearghus Ó Conchúir (2013: 92).
- ^{vi} Until this point, Siamsa Tíre received a revenue grant for the theatre but not for the company.
- ^{vii} James Cowdery (1990) notes the relationship between ‘The Blackbird’ and ‘Iníon an Fhaoit ón nGleann’ in his examination of melodic structures in Irish traditional music.
- ^{viii} The Jack Lyons Steps were the basis of a short scene for five dancers involving chairs, which featured in *Sean Agus Nua* and other productions. The steps also featured in the second act of *Ding Dong Dederó* when the Munnix character is teaching an advanced class of dancers who will go on to teach the community and further develop the dance.

THE LOGIC OF VIOLENCE: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF DUBLIN'S ILLEGAL DRUG TRADE — BRENDAN MARSH

REVIEW BY ALINA BEZLAJ

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Brendan Marsh, in his concise monograph titled 'The Logic of Violence: An Ethnography of Dublin's Illegal Drug Trade', sets out to explore the role of violence in the context of Dublin's illegal drug-trade market. Despite its brevity, the book convincingly demonstrates the idiosyncratic functioning of the underground drug-market, covering the experiences of those on the lowest as well as of those on the highest positions within its highly hierarchically organized system.

In tracing the factors contributing to the violence within the drug trade which, since its formation, has claimed a number of lives, Marsh looks at the variety of actors involved in the distribution of drugs. In looking at different actors and contexts of violence, the author attempts to set his explanation of violence at the interaction of personal and societal characteristics, focusing primarily on the level of the personal and on the individual. He conducted interviews with people who were at one or another time involved in the Dublin drug trade; altogether 35 interlocutors' testimonies are included in the book. Their accounts are evocative, occasionally intriguing, and often shocking and gruesome. It is largely through these accounts that the author manages to draw a vivid image of what the drug dealing scene in Dublin looks like and demonstrates the crucial role of violence in forming the basic structure of this sector. Through the experiences of people working at different levels within this scene, we can see that there is often a cyclical continuity between victims and perpetrators of the violence associated with this world. We can also clearly understand the impossibility for the members of the trade to escape violence, as the nature of organized criminality itself inevitably ties people to its reproduction. The participants in the distribution of drugs who must take care of their own survival are usually left with no other choice but to continuously reproduce the inherent violence.

The book is an easy and straightforward read, with a clearly defined structure. In the introduction, the author delves into methodology and gives a short overview of the history of Dublin drug trade's development. In the second chapter, he reviews the up-to-date research into the nature and character of the organised criminality around the distribution of drugs in Dublin. The author's own research is the subject of the next three chapters. In chapter three, he looks at the experience of addicts, the most vulnerable small-time dealers and users on the lowest scale of the drug trade's hierarchy, who resort to violence to gratify their cravings without caring for the well-being of their fellows. In the following chapter, the book continues with the description of the logic of debts in the drug trade. As people tend to borrow money to buy drugs and are later often incapable of repaying the growing amount of money they owe, they either risk being killed or, else, are forced into repaying their debts by committing murders. In chapter six, the author goes on to explore the relationships between individuals involved in the drug

trade, as well as the crucial role of violence in shielding one's reputation in the trade. He argues that if people want to keep their status and survive within the brutal conditions of the trade, feelings of shame and humiliation must immediately be substituted by rage and commitment to violence, and retribution for disrespect must be sought. Finally, the book concludes with an overview of different agents in the drug trade (the 'addict' and the 'gangster'), their personality types and the kinds of violence related to them.

Throughout the book, the author aims to develop his basic argument - that violence is on the one side shaped by the social conditions and on the other side by a specific 'violent' personality. To explain the intertwinement between these two aspects, Marsh uses Bourdieu's concept of habitus, socially shaped violent tendencies and dispositions of the social actors within the milieu of the drug market. The main theoretical contribution of the book is thus rather straight-forward; to explain violence within the Dublin drug trade, the author links the psychology of a (violent) individual with the wider societal context and points to the impacts they have on each other. Beyond this, the discussion of theoretical perspectives is largely missing. The theoretical basis in the book is largely concerned only with individual-oriented theories of violence within the drug trade and could benefit from a more in-depth engagement with more general anthropological and philosophical theories of violence. The lack of theoretical discussion ultimately leaves the reader with an impression that the drug trade is an isolated bubble, saturated with violence from within. But what the author failed to adequately present is the wider context within which the drug trade takes place. The author could, for example, include an analysis of the impact of extraneous structural and symbolic violences that affect people within the drug trade. In this way, the readers would be better able to understand the embeddedness of the drug trade and its violence more firmly within the context that gives rise to it. Because of this lack of attention to the wider contextual (social, political, cultural, economic...) forces and their own violence, the book is not so much an account of the logic of violence as an account of the logic of the drug trade, infused with violence – albeit portrayed in an extraordinarily vivid and well-written account. Unfortunately, however, the deeper understanding of the logic of violence itself remains elusive and the reader may feel as if he or she may not have been given understandings they were hoping for. To his credit, Marsh himself states that he is 'aware that /his/ analysis may not endear itself to those who seek a structural explanation of harm' (p.1).

While the lack of a more profound engagement with theory may be something that readers may miss, the book nonetheless is a valuable account and offers a highly vivid image of a setting that is otherwise largely inaccessible to most readers. First-person accounts presented in the book are valuable in themselves insofar as they elucidate the individual experience and affectivity of those involved in the highly violent illegal trade. Finally, the book should prove a useful reading for students of psychology, sociology and anthropology who are interested in crime and violence, as well as for those involved in addiction or community development studies. By presenting a clear account of the mechanisms

operating within the drug trade's workings and the long-term shackles that these place on people, the book will perhaps prove most useful to those attempting interventions in the lives of individuals or communities who are in this, or another way related to the drug trade in Dublin.

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SOUNDING DISSENT: REBEL SONGS, RESISTANCE, AND IRISH REPUBLICANISM — STEPHEN R. MILLAR

REVIEW BY SINÉAD LYNCH

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Musical performance as a means of marking ethno-religious and political territory in post-conflict Northern Ireland is a rich and vibrant area of inquiry in recent decades. Stephen Millar's book, which focuses on music as resistance, opens new horizons in this field which has so far focused mainly on loyalist and republican public marching and parade music. The first book on this topic, it homes in on the Belfast rebel music scene and its use of participatory musical performance as a tool of resistance against British colonialism. Millar contextualises this form of musical resistance as part of a historical trajectory stretching back as far as the late eighteenth century. In fact, historical analysis constitutes almost half of the book. However, by revisiting key events in Irish history through an ethnomusicological lens, the author illustrates that music has in fact been a key tool of cultural resistance since the beginning of the Irish republican struggle. Through the analysis of song lyrics inspired by political conflicts and historical explanation, Millar skilfully demonstrates that the roots of songs performed within the current rebel music scene, which have emerged in the last century and tend to be written from the perspective of the Troubles, can be followed back to specific republican sources from the past.

The ethnographic portion of the book focuses mainly on performances at the Rock Bar in West Belfast as well as other republican pubs, bars, and social clubs across Belfast. The rebel music that Millar explores in the book is part of a highly ritualised subcultural scene that stands in contrast to the republican music played at public marches and are a public sonic marking of ethno-religious difference. Despite its claims to inclusiveness, today's rebel music is performed within spaces of ethno-cultural homogeneity, removed from those who would be offended by its sectarian overtones. Mirroring tensions highlighted by James Connolly, today's rebel music scene is divided between adherents who use the songs to commemorate the past and those who use them to mobilise and propel a more militant version of republicanism into the future (p.204). It is a form of sonic resistance that is overt, intentional, performative and participatory.

The opening chapter develops a working definition of rebel songs which centres on theme, function, understanding and manipulation of meaning. There are four main musical sources from which Irish rebel songs stem: revolutionary songs, broadsheet ballads, and materials from the Young Ireland and Fenian movements. The songs, which were cyclically remembered, reworked and sung, were a vehicle for communicating republican ideology and have been an expression of sonic and lyrical resistance that mirrored violent resistance. Chapter two explores socialism and nationalism in the early twentieth century in Ireland and the central role rebel songs played during the 1916 Easter Rising. Those who

fought in the rising used songs to memorialise republicans who died fighting, to transmit their ideals and to elevate their own spirits amidst resisting the British state. This chapter also looks at how the twofold function of some republicans as both authors and subjects of rebel songs led to their accrual of legendary status that fed into the ensuing cycles of rebellion, thus shaping future generations.

This is followed, in chapter three, by an analysis of rebel songs in republican and civil rights protests in the initial years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Here rebel songs were used as a channel for the Catholic, nationalist, and republican community to voice their discontent; however, as Millar highlights, the sectarian character of many of the songs ran counter to the civil rights movement's claims of cross community values. This chapter also details some sobering accounts of music as an instrument of torture unleashed by the state on suspected republicans as a means of asserting cultural dominion.

The author goes on, in chapter four, to explore the continuity created by Bobby Sands between his own use of music and that of the United Irishmen and the Fenians. The author's descriptions of how republicans used music of resistance to challenge the state from within the H-Block prison during the Troubles continues to build a powerful case for the pivotal role music has played in republican struggle.

The author then analyses the unique type of republican identity that audiences both express and reinforce through active participation in the rebel music scene in Belfast today. This kind of rebel music is characterised by what Turino defines as participatory music (2008: 33); a key aspect of this type of performance prioritises a softening of performer-audience boundaries through audience participation. The author highlights that the kind of republican working-class identity created in this context represents a complex kind of resistance that bypasses the need for building a meaningful and nuanced theoretical or political identity. Although, it should be mentioned that it is unlikely this is what the audience members are seeking through their participation. The performative synergy that unfolds between performer and republican audiences is highly dependent on the role of audience members in endorsing the musicians, those whom the music commemorates and fellow audience members. The closing chapter is fascinating from an ethnographic perspective, exploring how violent republicanism is embodied during performance through physical and sonic references to gunfire. Millar also describes how the current republican musicians name check conflicts from other parts of the world to lend greater validity to their own status as republicans.

By dedicating the first half of the book to a rich and thorough analysis of the historical trajectory of music's role in republican resistance, Millar demonstrates that music has been consistently used in connecting past and present in republican struggle and for producing counter-narratives that oppose the state's hegemonic power. He persuasively argues that although rebel songs might express 'broader truths' about the relationship between Britain and Ireland, they also create a false continuity by homogenising republican struggles from past and present, thus intensifying emotional responses from the audiences. This is a crucial ethnographic finding with important implications for further research in

ethnomusicological studies on music and identity and music and emotion. By weaving historical analysis into vivid ethnographic accounts from musicians in the rebel music scene, the author artfully demonstrates that stories we tell ourselves about who we are individually, culturally and in relationship to each other are in fact, historically grounded in a particular time and place and that these stories are socially preserved and passed on. As such, the broad-brush strokes approach to history many of the rebel songs take, is not suitably nuanced to provide the listener with an accurate educative account of historical events.

This argument loops back to one of the author's claims in the introduction of the book: that repetition in rebel songs is owed to the power of social memory and interconnects with earlier historical times. This calls for a problematisation of those historical origins and how they are used in the present time. Millar quotes ethnomusicologist Margaret Kartomi (2010:474–75) who points out that in studying cultures of conflict, it is essential to critically analyse the causes of specific conflict and identify whether they differ from conflict of the present, since “war-related arts . . . to repeat from war to war.”

Given the comprehensive historical analysis in the first half of the book which mainly covers a timespan prior to partition, it would have been interesting to see some contextual analysis of how republican music developed in the South of Ireland after partition and the tensions between rebel music as local musicking and as political nationalism.

The most compelling dimension of ‘Sounding Dissent’ is that rather than labouring the main argument of the book, Millar offers the reader comprehensive historical research that spans several centuries, as a way into the vibrant ethnography of today's rebel music scene in Belfast. It is an intellectually courageous approach that leaves the reader room to critically interrogate the findings and will undoubtedly lead to lively discussion and further research across disciplines well into the future. As such this book is essential reading for students and scholars at all levels in ethnomusicology, Irish Studies, historical studies, music in peacebuilding and peace and conflict studies.

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ECOLOGICAL NOSTALGIAS: MEMORY, AFFECT AND CREATIVITY IN TIMES OF ECOLOGICAL UPHEAVALS — OLIVIA ANGÉ AND DAVID BERLINER

REVIEW BY KATLYNE ARMSTRONG

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Stepping outside today and engaging with the natural world entails a sense of change, irreversible and uncontrollable change. What can be learned from considering the emotion and subsequent response this engenders? *Ecological Nostalgias: Memory, Affect and Creativity in Times of Ecological Upheavals* is a timely collection that reflects upon and unpacks longings for past times, places, and life forms becoming increasingly out of reach in various communities around the world. The result is a worthwhile contribution to ways of living within ecological upheavals, as well as to thinking about and approaches to the environmental crisis at large.

The eight chapters presented by the range of anthropologists gathered here draw upon eight ethnographies which collectively piece together four core ideas outlined in the Introduction. Olivia Angé and David Berliner, the editors of the volume, propose that ecological nostalgias are both spatial and temporal, unfold in natures-cultures, are critical and creative, or are otherwise imperialist. Though a collection of diverse voices and contexts, the flow of a book shines through as concepts harmonically ripple across the pages.

In Chapter Two, Kirsten Hastrup explores nostalgia in the northwest region of Greenland and paints the links between time and space. Imperialism has been deeply experienced in this region, particularly through the creation of the Thule Station in the early 20th century, its relocation and the construction of Camp Century during the Cold War in the mid-1900s. The resulting implications of these events, particularly of Camp Century, include the contamination of the North Water, a body of water that is deeply depended upon. Further, communities in the Thule Region directly experience climate change through the infrastructure of ice on which they live. Inhabitants are thus envisioned to already be a part of human heritage despite their existence in the present and their resiliency. As can be imagined, the people living here are losing their home without physically leaving it.

Common notions of our natural world are uprooted in several chapters. For example, in Chapter One, Roy Ellen describes the ways in which different groups place contrasting meanings upon the tropical rainforest. Both studies among the Dusun in Brunei and Nuaulu in Indonesia reveal ecological nostalgias informed by the role the rainforest plays in daily lives, which is unequal to Western relationships and perspectives, that the rainforest is a place to be protected. Additionally, Angé brings attention to how nature involves a myriad of living things in Chapter Five. In the highlands of Peru, there lies an interdependent relationship between humans and potatoes. An important ingredient for the

emergence of human societies, the potato has been vital to Andean communities for thousands of years. Thus, the importance for potatoes to flourish, which is dependent upon human care, is woven into daily lives, resulting in a “cross-species intimacy” (p.109) as growers seek to foster potato joy. Impacted by climate change, however, it is now often lamented that “the days are not as they used to be anymore” (p.107). But this is more than just a statement about the weather or climate; it involves a myriad of living things, including the potato.

In Chapter Three, Madeleine Sallustio’s research among neo-peasants in France illustrates that ecological nostalgias can trigger critique and creativity or, alternatively, be imperialist. The community Sallustio works with is made up of a group of individuals that have left the city to pursue a sustainable way of life through traditional peasantry, small scale agriculture, and self-sufficiency. By unsettling participation within a system experienced to be exploitative, these neo-peasants aim to disrupt and create foundational cracks from its margins. However, others appreciate the natural environment of this rural area in France with different values, uncovering more than one nostalgia. Holiday home owners, for example, long for a romantic image of rural life and question developments that aren’t deemed to uphold heritage authentically. Calling for preservation yet contributing toward a surge in the market of holiday homes and real estate inflation, longings in this way demonstrate how nostalgia is often unintentionally imperialist.

The collection as a whole allows for individual considerations but puts forth a collective contribution to a framework for ecological nostalgias. As these anthropologists illustrate, there are diverse ways of not only living within times of uncertainty, but there are diverse responses to this uncertainty as people search for a viable future. Moving through memory, affect, and creativity in these communities and considering how the past, present, and future are engaged with reveals considering how the past, present, and future is engaged with reveals the ‘stickiness’ of the ‘hard and soft’ (p.168). It does not necessarily offer solutions. It puts forth different ways of thinking at a moment when it is time to dig deep and do things differently. This book argues that “a strictly human-centred perspective cannot account for the importance of” ecological nostalgias (p.5). Rather, a multi-species approach is argued for, an approach that considers “human and other-than-human encounters” (p.166) and the “non-scalability of lives and landscapes” (p.46). In other words, our planet is too diverse to not account for all the forms of life we connect with.

What, then, is perhaps missing or should be expanded upon, is a deeper analysis of where to go from here. How do we combat nostalgia’s imperialist tendency and seek its creativity and critique? In the Afterword, Dominic Boyer supposes there has not been another kind apart from an imperialist ecological nostalgia, throwing into question its critique and creativity seen in the previous 177 pages. But maybe this is the point. Regardless of this confusion, the contribution to anthropology and to intersectional discourses taking place today is timely and significant. My research has certainly benefited from this reading and I imagine others partaking in environmental research and advocacy

within nostalgia, heritage, histories of resilience, and ways of living in the ongoing ecological crisis will as well. Anthropology indeed has a meaningful role to play.

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DELTA LIFE: EXPLORING DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENTS WHERE RIVERS MEET THE SEA — FRANZ KRAUSE AND MARK HARRIS (EDS.)

REVIEW BY BHARGABI DAS

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Delta Life is a fascinating anthology of ethnographic essays that tries to capture the lifeworld of a delta by focusing on the movements and transformations that such ecologies and people living there undergo. This focus along with the ethnographic approach allows the book to engage in epistemic questioning of the very terminologies like ‘Delta’ which contributors like Tanya Richardson show is a more ‘land-obsessed’ geographical category that cannot encompass within it the multiple relations and flows that deltaic life-worlds are home to. The three important concepts that each chapter engages in are Hydrosociality, Volatility and Multi-scalar rhythms, which are all inter-linked.

The volatile dynamism which is established in the book as a constancy in the deltaic world does not simply exist because of more-than-human factors such as sediments, water level, vegetation, sea creatures, wind-speed, etc. but also is deeply interlinked with interplay of socio-economic-cultural and political factors. For example, Benoit Ivars shows how availability of land for the delta dwellers in Myanmar’s Ayeyarwady Delta is not simply related to erosion caused by the river but also by the state policies on land, that constantly keep changing and with it, people’s claim on particular pieces of land as owners or not.

But what is interesting, particularly for people invested in movement studies, is how this book conceptualizes periods of stagnancy. The chapters bring out such periods through concepts of ‘waiting’, ‘stagnancy’, ‘quarantine’ or ‘pause’ but such periods are not understood as opposed to movement. Lukas Ley declares stagnation as triggering new socio-ecological movements. While Sandra Simon talking about gleaning practices during a ‘Mbissa’ shows how periods of waiting in between cycles are accompanied by various activities such that she conceptualizes the waiting period as ‘active waiting’. This kind of understanding of ‘non-movement’ is very similar to Ghassan Hage (2009) who in his edited volume called ‘Waiting’ reflects on the politics of waiting and understands it as a period beyond ‘non-action’ and ‘passivity’. Instead, waiting periods can reveal a lot of agency oozing out of people who keep on waiting.

The deltaic life-world as explored by this book can help contribute to anthropology of time, for such a life-world presents a sense of time which is not in tandem with the modern, capitalist world’s. Temporality and rhythm are touched upon by almost all authors in the book, wherein more-than-human factors or state policies play a bigger role in their understanding of time. Besides lunar and tidal cycles, which determine activities like molluscs gleaning or fishing etc. state policies can determine since when

one is a land-owner or when will one be out of exclusionary urban spaces of wetness. I call this notion of time 'relational time', such that deltaic temporality instead of being dictated by capitalist market and labor division of time, is instead networked. People's sense of time is deeply entangled with non-people's sense of time and activities. This work then is in tandem with works by anthropologists such as Malini Sur (2020) and Andrea Ballesterio (2019). While Sur talking about cattle smugglers in Indo-Bangladesh border notes how notion of time is related to opening of borders, seasonality and periods of waiting, Ballesterio talking about lower-level bureaucrats managing water prices in Costa Rica and Brazil understands future-time as non-apocalyptic and something one can change. Just like Sur and Ballesterio, the authors extract notions of temporality through their participants' understanding of time.

Though an anthology of varied essays, the chapters are in constant interaction with each other, be it through building on the other's concept or critiquing another author. At one point in her chapter Richardson underlines how though Krause successfully brings out the inhabitant's varied understanding of water or sediments, he fails to question if the inhabitants consider that life-world as a delta at all. This also makes the writing reflexive, wherein one is constantly questioning one's own positionality too. This comes out well in Ivars' understanding of how he himself might have become an 'anchoring' point for his participants who were desperate to get their claims on land validated.

Despite state apathy and ecological destruction, the authors in the book refrain from projecting the delta dwellers as victims. Be it the men in the Ayeyarwady Delta who continuously negotiate (sometimes lie) with the state to claim land ownership or the women in the Senegalese Sine-Saloum Delta who decide when their period of 'Mbissa' starts, the dwellers' life-worlds are shown as beyond oppression and neglect. This is also how the authors are able to capture a life-world that is messy, complex and is constantly changing and flowing in different directions. The multiplicity of actors and factors that are guiding deltaic lifeworld is well brought out.

However, this branching out to varied directions, trying to pull in multiple factors that are guiding deltaic rhythmicity has the tendency for the readers to get confused in the narrative. Besides, considering the book can also be seen as a project on decolonizing narratives, perspectives and terminologies, the authors could have used more of the terminologies that are 'indigenous' to the communities which would make the narrative richer, for it allows the seepage of varied meanings and relations that cannot be captured through translations. Concepts such as rhythm, scale, etc. which are critical to understanding the deltaic life-world have not been explained clearly resulting in limiting its audience, for the book might not be suitable for non-anthropologists or non-academic readers. Though it does pick up works by Lahiri-Dutt and Samanta (2013), I wish the authors would have had more conversation with works on liminal ecologies such as 'chars' in South Asia, particularly Lukas Ley, who understands islands as heterotopic spaces or spaces of confinement very similar to a camp or a boat. However, my ethnographic fieldwork among the Bengali Muslim char-dwellers in North-east India has shown how

islands are spaces of productivity or creativity, including boats, where dwellers started an entire genre of music called ‘Bhatiali’.

But the book is a tremendous contribution beyond delta studies – the ‘deltaic approach’ can be applied to studies of infrastructure, particularly bureaucracy to note how a culture of flux defines its practices or even identity studies of anti-racism or anti-sexism wherein identities are understood more as osmosis and always ‘becoming’. Thus, the book is in tandem with classic works on ‘becoming’ by Deleuze-Guattari (1987) while also introducing exciting new concepts to newer schools of thought such as the ‘New Mobility Studies/Paradigm’. Anyone interested in ethnographically exploring theoretical focus on movements, liminality, hydrosociality, etc. should definitely read this book.

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WHO'S CASHING IN? CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON NEW MONIES AND GLOBAL CASHLESSNESS — ATREYEE SEN, JOHAN LINDQUIST AND MARIE KOLLING (EDS.)

REVIEW BY DEVON GIDLEY

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The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift away from cash. As such, the contemporary perspectives on going cashless offered by this edited collection come at an opportune time. The book seeks to provide anthropological views on “how social actors and agents respond to the changing materiality of money” (p. xiv-xv). Depending on the reader’s intersectional perspective, cashlessness likely conjures up a variety of understandings. As these authors show, there is no single definition. The contributions in this volume enlighten the reader to the diversity of the concept, and the ways cashlessness is experienced by different peoples to demonstrate that the impact of going cashless is context specific.

The authors use the concept of cash, and therefore cashlessness, as a starting point, exploring the varied aspects of credit and debt on populations newly introduced, voluntarily or otherwise, into the Global North financial system. The editors divide the collection into three parts each composed of three chapters and a commentary. The first section deals with the impact of cashlessness on vulnerable populations using ethnographies from the Roma in Denmark (see Camilla Ida Ravnbøl), low-income Brazilians (see Marie Kolling), and Danish youth (see Pernille Hohnen). The second section focuses on “new technologies and infrastructures” (xxvii) including remittance transfers (money sent home electronically by migrant workers) and blockchain (decentralized democratized building blocks of some virtual currency). The book might have benefited from a deeper perspective on cashless advocates as the sole chapter by Michael Ulfstjerne on entrepreneurs pushing Bitcoin and blockchain feels insufficient. The final section brings materiality to the forefront. Morten Axel Pedersen exemplifies this through his description of performative bodies of Chyenjüüd, Mongolian market vendors who resell items they borrowed on credit. In response to the introduction of capitalism, the body becomes material and the salesman a living mannequin inseparable from the consigned products for sale.

The ethnographic chapters anchor the abstract notions of cash and labour in everyday experiences. In particular, Camilla Ida Ravnbøl shows both the hard work and financial acrobatics of Roma visitors collecting and returning recyclables on the summer music festival circuit. In contrast, the reflective chapters hint at the need for new theories on the monetization of social relations while leaving the reader wanting more. For example, Theodoros Rakopoulos examines mafia obsession with the, at first rare and now discontinued, 500 Euro banknote before segueing into the absurdity of creating a single denomination nearly equivalent to an average month’s pay in some EU countries. The reader is left desiring further reading on both views.

There is no single theoretical focus or argument on the consequences of the push toward cashless economies and societies. However, the collection does have one unifying idea, that top-down policy rationales for changing the materiality of money ignore the real impact these policies have on (mostly vulnerable) people. Whether it is governments coopting blockchain (see Michael Ulfstjerne) or banks pushing overdraft accounts (see Pernille Hohnen), the book reveals how people on the ground cope with changes to the meaning of cash. In the case of India, the government's decision to restrict access to cash led to long queues in the hot sun for ATM access but also reordered the traditional caste system with the poor coming to be seen as 'human' (p. 119).

The ethnographic chapters expose the grounded reality of economic innovations that are so often ignored in traditional management journals. For example, despite studying the "ultra-poor" in Bangladesh, Mair and Marti (2009) provide a somewhat sanitized view of Global South entrepreneurship by focusing on the work of a formal non-governmental organization using institutional theory. In contrast, in this volume, Marie Kolling conjures the raw image of a fruit vendor spending most of her week trying to collect debts from her equally poor neighbors/customers.

The book leads with its strengths. The first three heavily ethnographic chapters offer deep insights into everyday life and consequences for living in an increasingly cashless society. The stories feature predominantly poor, marginalized, and informal workers pushing against policy discourses on the benefits of going cashless (i.e. reducing poverty and corruption). While ostensibly designed to help the poor, the book complexifies the shift to virtual currency and credit. Most chapters take the view that cashlessness exacerbates existing inequalities. In contrast, Atreyee Sen's chapter from India offers a more complex empirical context where the changing materiality of money alters social relations. When India demonetized most cash, it caused day labourers to work for months with no pay. The consequence was that middle-class employers became indebted to their employees rather than vice versa. Collectively, the chapters illustrate that there is no single universal consequence to cashlessness.

This book will benefit readers wanting an introduction to the ongoing shift away from traditional paper money and towards cashlessness. It serves as both a commentary and primer on the subject. Additionally, it would interest established researchers who focus on state-sponsored economic decisions and ground level consequences of policy, as well as the role of materiality in social relations. Finally, management scholars would also benefit from this volume, gaining insights on ground level impacts and marginalized populations often ignored by mainstream journals.

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HIERARCHY AND VALUE: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON MORAL ORDER — JASON HICKEL AND NAOMI HAYNES (EDS.)

REVIEW BY ZACH ROCHE

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Within the traditions of mainstream academia, it is relatively common to see scathing critiques of hierarchy, both as a framework for organising society and as a set of values in and of itself. This edited book assembles six chapters from a wide variety of locales, times and spaces to re-open the question of what it might mean to confront and discuss hierarchy, rather than dismissing it out of hand. In doing so the editors navigate through murky waters, and carefully explain that they are not attempting to justify, or argue in favour of hierarchies such as patriarchies, caste systems, or racisms.

Instead the concept of value serves as a thread woven throughout the book and each of the six chapters grapples with how and why value is placed on some hierarchies and not others. In this way the authors axiomatically reject that cultures, societies and peoples who continue to live with and embrace hierarchy in an overt way are simply duped or labouring under the delusions of false consciousness. We are therefore pressed to confront the question: what is the *verstehen* of hierarchy? If these people are not deceived, what is it about hierarchy that is preferable relative to egalitarianism?

The editors have done commendable work in drawing together such a variety of high-quality answers to these questions. Howell demonstrates that when a new hierarchy (the Catholic church) attempts to encompass a traditional value system (*Adat*), the new hierarchy can find itself frustrated not by open opposition, but rather by people's refusal to draw their ethical and moral values from the newer system. Malara and Boylston explore love and hierarchy in Ethiopia and what happens when hierarchies are taken to be axiomatically self-justifying, with submission expected to all those who are 'above' oneself in a strictly vertical social ecosystem. Damon offers us a fascinating ethnography of how creative destruction can prefigure and bind the gift relation. Concerning civilization Feuchtwang flips our presumptions on their head, arguing that what we suppose to be egalitarianism can be a hierarchy of its own as it involves a ranking of who is more 'civilized' or capable of contributing towards social stability. Khan's argument has the echo of Malara and Boylston's about submission within hierarchy, but also illustrates the strain that occurs when politics and religion clash. Smedel closes the book by considering that demotion or removal of aristocratic privileges can actually be to one's benefit (pending a ritual of humiliation) in a social system where the benefits of 'privilege' are not what we expect.

While the book is certainly worth reading, and each chapter is interesting in and of themselves, the central tenet of the book (hierarchy) sometimes vanishes almost entirely and appears (begrudgingly) in the conclusion.

There also could have been a more systematic address of the elephant in the room – religion. Each chapter deals with religion, religious symbols, rites, the strain between new religions and old traditions (etc.), but this rarely figures explicitly in the discussions around hierarchy. Rather, the authors take a conceptual step back from this, approaching the linkages from a theoretical, rather than empirical direction. In certain cases this makes the book read inorganically, as the twin concepts of hierarchy and value are forced to fit the data, rather than slipping seamlessly into place.

Hierarchy and Value closes with an excellent afterword by none other than David Graeber who explores the deep history of the term ‘hierarchy’ within the traditions of anthropology. Graeber makes the salient point that until the 1960s, the word hierarchy was not even within the popular lexicon. Authors instead made use of terms such as domination/submission, privilege, rank, status, authority and so on. Graeber credits the rise of hierarchy as an empirical tool and theoretical construct to Dumont, who pushed for the inclusion of hierarchy within anthropology virtually alone for much of his life. Graeber’s argument is that hierarchy is an ontologically and epistemologically charged term which presupposes that if a hierarchy exists, it is inherently self-justifying. In writing this afterword Graeber invites us to reflect on the hierarchies in our own lived experiences and to make a greater effort to be more precise in our use of language – for example when we talk about hierarchy, do we actually mean status?

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CHINA AT A THRESHOLD: EXPLORING SOCIAL CHANGE IN TECHNO-SOCIAL SYSTEMS — JAMES B. CUFFE

REVIEW BY STUART LANG

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China at a Threshold, above all else, offers the reader a nuanced perspective of a nation and people often poorly understood in the West. While the focus of the author is squarely on the relationship between communications technologies and Chinese society, this account also offers a more general insight into the lives of Chinese denizens. Beyond that, the book has application across the planet as advanced communications technologies become increasingly ubiquitous. But the author is quick to point out that we must avoid attributing too much of a sense of agency to the technology itself as not only does this incorrectly assume the role of technology in mediating social interaction but leads us into pitfalls such as the Western-held fallacy that technological advancement equals increased democratisation and liberalism. In doing so, we gloss over the numerous actual effects of communications technology on society today, namely the communication it facilitates between individuals and society at large (the congruency manifold), rather than the technology itself. This book opens with a discussion on the dangers of Western scholarship's attempt to generalise or make assumptions about China (chapter 1), followed by a presentation of the "Democracy Wall" and the events of Xidan Street in 1978, and their influence on what would become modern China (chapter 2). In chapter 3, Cuffe focuses on technology itself and contemplates "progress", chapter 4 continues the focus on technology in more specific reference to the Chinese experience. Chapters 5 and 6 of the book focus on more specific elements of the relationship between communications technology and Chinese society, with analysis of Grass-Mud Horse in the former and an exploration of the popular reality tv shows "Super Girl" and "Let's Go! Oriental Angel", and contestants of these tv shows that inhabit spaces outside normative conceptions of what it means to be Chinese in the latter.

The author presents the reader with a number of cases, with an emphasis placed on three in particular, each offering an insight into a more faithful expression of the complex web of interactions within Chinese society through technology. We are given three liminal figures that act as exemplars in the discussion of being on the "threshold", two of which are reality television participants, Lou Jing and Li Yunchun, each challenging different conceptions and creating incongruencies within the normative perceptions of what it is to be Chinese. Their liminality being, in part, facilitated by mass communications technology. The third, a "trickster" character, Grass-Mud Horse, cleverly presented through the theoretical work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin, is a representation of the relationship between the censors and the censored. However, as is made evident by the author time and time again, it is not as simple as a binary relationship between the censored and censors. Instead, Grass-Mud Horse, as a publicly accessible mythical figure, and its adversary the River Crab, act as an analogue

for the relationship between certain segments of Chinese society and the ruling Communist Party. The Grass-Mud Horses, and their conflict with the River Crabs, alongside Lou Jing and Li Yunchun, are doorways through which an understanding of differing social experience, not only for the researcher but also for Chinese people themselves, can be found. On the other hand, take for example the following, ‘The development of new mediative technologies in China has obfuscated agency and responsibility so that state power can locate the individual but the individual cannot locate the state’ (2019, 105). This is not what is promised in Western ideals of technological progress, and yet it is through technological development that the state can exercise much more control over the individual. The author illustrates through these examples, that communication technologies do not contribute to a linear form of “progress”, instead there is constant flux, of liminality.

The author situates China in a place of “permanent liminality”. Drawing from this concept, it ‘allows us to position China differently, at a threshold moment, not yet realised but neither at some stage in a teleological framework’ (2019, 25). In other words, following Cuffe’s permanent liminality shows us that one cannot predict where the relationship between technology and society will lead to, only that the interplay of technology and social change will continue to be a facet of life. Communications technology itself is not what we academics should be concerned with per se, instead the focus should be squarely on its capacity to facilitate. On a grander scale, it is difficult to predict in what direction China itself will go, for there is no guarantee that it will follow the Western tradition. The author must be commended on their challenge to the all-too-common Western narrative of increases in technological complexity equates to increased “progress”, and the belief that democracy is an inevitable outcome for those societies that adopt and utilise ever more complex technology. For as Cuffe illustrates, it is not so clear cut.

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THE MORAL WORK OF ANTHROPOLOGY — HANNE OVERGAARD MOGENSEN AND BIRGITTE GORM HANSEN (EDS.)

REVIEW BY ELLEN A. AHLNESS

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The Moral Work of Anthropology centers on six central questions:

Why do so many anthropologists say they are not real anthropologists?

Why are anthropologists so preoccupied with their moral commitments?

Why do so many anthropologists want to save the world?

Why do so many anthropologists emphasize complexity?

Why do so many anthropologists hesitate to explicate anthropological practice?

Why do so many anthropologists disown power?

Interrogation of these questions is conducted across six chapters, an introduction, and conclusion. The editors assert that the humanities are being pushed to justify their relevance, even as the desire for greater anthropological knowledge has increased inside and outside of academia. However, they do not explain in what context greater anthropological knowledge is desired. North American readers in particular may be skeptical of this claim, witnessing the shrinking of anthropology and humanities departments in higher education.

The authors suggest the issue of highest interest to anthropologists is morality, consequently the contributions to this collection address the ways in which anthropologists try to ‘do good,’ and how they identify good. Yet ‘good’ and ‘right’ are highly subjective events rooted in cultural context. Focusing on anthropological work in four professional areas— healthcare, business, management, and interdisciplinary research—the book’s agenda is driven by its origins in the Danish context. Contributors to this edited volume range from graduate and early career researchers to tenured professors, though they are unified by overarching subjects and methods. All contributors carry out biographical interviews within their field, place emphasis on their collaboration with partners, and have worked for some period of time at the Anthropology Department at Copenhagen University. All but one contributor received their education at one of two Departments of Anthropology in Denmark. The editors maintain that the theoretical insights of the researchers do differ and are cross-cutting; however, one must be wary that similarities in professionalization do not lead to similar assumptions and biases among practitioners.

In the introduction, the editors discuss the origins for the edited volume: a major field conference theme on the justification for anthropology and its ability to make the world a better place through applied and

engaged work. Yet the idea of what ‘a more just world’ means was not answered, prompting the need for the edited volume. The editors promote anthropologists as collaborators with subjects, yet recognize that the idea of anthropologists as collaborators, rather than imposers, is still an idealized vision and not fully a reality.

The *Moral Work of Anthropology*’s central premise is that social practices and commonalities of anthropologists are not defined by a particular set of competencies or skills, but a shared preoccupation with moral questions. One of the book’s strengths is its argument for the value of knowledge generated from policy work as constituting a legitimate basis for constructing theory, challenging academic purism in knowledge construction and dissemination. Yet readers may feel a sense of discomfort over how visions of ‘moral work’ vary so widely. It is certainly possible that someone’s response to a moral question, while thought out, is not itself moral.

The introduction focuses heavily on the anthropology of ethics, which is a heavily necessary section given that the entire book itself is considering the idea of moral behavior in anthropology. The editors provide a relatively concise history of Danish socio-political policy and its function as a germination ground for anthropology to have a disproportionately high presence in Danish higher education compared to other European countries. The introduction is theoretically grounded, setting up each chapter to look at case studies and individual experiences in a balanced way. A repeated theme across the book though is the claim that many of the anthropologists the contributors worked with said they did not feel like they were real anthropologists. However, beyond these anecdotes there is little discussed evidence for this claim.

Each of the chapters contributes to explaining why subfields care for anthropology, but perhaps none does so better than Chapter 1, *Caring for Others*. This chapter looks at the affinity between health care and anthropology, and was a good transition into later chapters’ case studies. Similarly, Chapter 5 dealt with a pertinent topic, how individuals find and discern distinctions between good and bad practices when these practices are already supposedly defined by authorities. Overall, the contributors effectively discuss how their collaborative and individual field work experiences articulate and illustrate how much thought anthropologists put into thinking about the moral landscapes they work in, and how much people want to work as individuals and in communities to improve the world they live in.

The *Moral Work of Anthropology* is best for advanced graduate students and established subfield practitioners, both academic and non-academic. Advanced graduate students will particularly benefit, as they will likely have their own field work ambitions or experiences under their belt and thus better appreciate the reckonings, challenges, and questions that are raised in this text. Moreover, as many of the chapters are written by early career and graduate scholars, there is closeness to integrating moral questions into early work that will resonate with these early scholars. Yet it does seem that many of the questions and identities that the authors attribute to anthropologists may be shared by others in the

humanities and social sciences, including the effects of conducting moral work of varying intensity experienced by researchers across the field.

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BUILD BETTER WORLDS: AN INTRODUCTION TO ANTHROPOLOGY FOR GAME DESIGNERS, FICTION WRITERS, AND FILMMAKERS — MICHAEL KILMAN AND KATE WELLSTROM

REVIEW BY DEVON GIDLEY

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Build Better Worlds presents an introduction to anthropology via the unusual technique of analyzing examples from fictional worlds. A broad view is provided as almost two dozen topics in anthropology are covered. Most topics are based in social cultural anthropology, but some chapters do examine linguistic, biological, and archaeological anthropology. Each chapter centers on a theme (e.g. “Race in History and Imagination”), utilizes a few selected academic anthropology texts (e.g. Malinowski), and provides examples from fictional worlds (e.g. Harry Potter). In a strong aspect, each chapter ends with reflective questions for readers to consider when building or experiencing fictional worlds.

The book’s main argument is that writers and creators of fictional worlds (in film, television, and video games) can improve their creativity by considering an anthropological perspective on world building. The argument rests on two assumptions. First, believable fictional worlds are like a house – the reader only sees the paint and furnishings. For stories and characters to connect with a reader, the foundation must be solid. World building creates the essential, yet hidden, aspects of a story – the studs, plumbing, and wiring. Second, plots and characters are a reflection and exploration of humanity. This could mean stories of how people should act or how they really do act (although the book reminds us that anthropology shies away from monolithic culture and binary categories). Fictional worlds, either fantasy (Lord of the Rings) or sci-fi (Star Trek), serve as the setting for the same types of themes. The world may not be Earth and the characters may not be human, but the story is still about the human experience.

In turn, anthropology allows the writer and reader to consider different cultural perspectives. The book does not focus on a single theory, but rather presents a primer on various anthropological fields and topics. The book is a “toolkit” for readers to use as they see fit.

The main strengths of the book are in the concept, the ease of reading, the broad coverage of anthropology, and the probing questions at the end of each chapter. That being said, there are three areas of unfulfilled potential that keep the book from being an unqualified recommendation. First, the title promises world building and anthropology. The book delivers on the anthropology, but the world building feels underbuilt. The individual “things to consider” questions are useful, but the book could have benefited from a fuller practical example of using anthropology in the creative process. Without it, the reader is left with an incomplete feeling. Partly, this may be due to the lack of a concluding or

summary chapter. The book abruptly ends after a chapter on the supernatural as fear and anxiety. Second, examples from fictional worlds are underutilized and under analyzed. There are a few references to famous works and less known ones (e.g. Gattaca), but they are not as prevalent as possible. Many examples are one sentence descriptions whereas a paragraph would have further supported and illustrated the point being made. For example, the authors effectively discuss gender with a multi-paragraph discussion on the cultural consequences of dwarves (traditionally male) becoming female in Terry Pratchett's Discworld. In other cases, an alternative illustration from the same world might have provided stronger support. In chapter 13 on economics, the authors pose a few questions about economics in the Star Trek universe, but the world offered other talking points: how replicators impact culture by reducing scarcity or how the profit-obsessed Ferengi contrast with working for free or symbolic capital in Star Fleet. Third, videogames are underrepresented. The potential for anthropology in video games, especially role playing games, is magnified since players become immersed in a world through a personal avatar. In the case of massive multiplayer online role playing games (e.g. World of Warcraft), developers' choices and game rules influence how players may experience but also perform culture within the story. In my own research (Gidley & Palmer, 2022), I observed how creators may develop a deep backstory and world even for simple prototypes.

The book is written for two types of readers: fiction writers and entry level anthropology students. Writers will find the most use by considering how the two dozen topics factor into their fictional world. The book challenges writers to be more creative and reduce reliance on clichés. Non-writers may also benefit by becoming more critical readers of fiction. For students, especially university freshmen and sophomores with limited exposure to other cultures, the book offers a creative way to learn anthropology. The book is an easy read, thereby challenging students with ideas and perspectives rather than complex theoretical concepts. According to a lecture by Michael Kilman at the Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Meeting (2022), the book was based on techniques used in teaching an undergraduate anthropology course. Indeed, the book could be used as a non-traditional textbook for general cross-cultural or anthropology courses.

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