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***Breaking the Silence: Emigration, gender and the making of  
Irish cultural memory***

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## ***Breaking the Silence: emigration, gender and the making of Irish cultural memory***

In the second half of the twentieth century the relatively new practice of telling, listening to and recording life narratives – variously described as oral history, oral testimony and oral life narrative – gained recognition as a useful mode of historical and experiential reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> In Ireland, the development of an oral history or narrative approach to research led to the establishment of new sound archives, and opened up fresh ways of narrating, listening to and engaging with lives lived in a variety of contexts.<sup>2</sup> More recently, oral evidence has been noted for its particular merit in providing access to the hidden histories of migration.<sup>3</sup> However, oral historical studies of Irish migration have tended to focus primarily on emigration, arrival and settlement, with little serious attention being devoted to experiences of staying ‘at home’ and the relationships between migration and gendered subjectivity. Taking a sociological rather than an oral historical approach, this chapter attends to staying-put as part of the dynamic of migration. More specifically, it examines that kinds of subjectivities produced in the life narratives of one woman who emigrated and another who remained in Ireland during the 1950s, during which time nearly half a million people left Ireland, with about two-thirds of these emigrating to Britain.<sup>4</sup>

The two life narratives discussed in this chapter were recorded as part of the *Breaking the Silence: Staying ‘at home’ in an emigrant society* oral archive project carried out by the Irish Centre for Migration Studies based at University College Cork.<sup>5</sup> The aim of this project was to document and archive individual experiences of staying in Ireland in the 1950s, while they were still available in living memory. Its target population was people who stayed and who were in the 65-74 age bracket at the time of interview. Following extensive publicity in the national and local media in early 2000, one hundred and seventeen people indicated an interest in contributing to the project.<sup>6</sup> A small team of researchers was trained to conduct and digitally record the interviews and, by the end of the project, 78 life narratives were archived in sound and a further 12 in text.<sup>7</sup> Some individuals who emigrated and returned were included because of their particular interest in questions of staying-put and in some cases because they identified themselves as the ones who stayed.

All of the interviewees used an interview guide, which began with each interviewee’s time and place of birth, and then loosely directed them through their life course, focusing in detail on their negotiations of staying or emigrating and ending with questions relating to their circumstances at the time of the interview. Although this interview guide influenced the narrative, it was primarily used as a checklist to ensure that certain topics were covered, rather than as a rigidly administered interviewing tool. The interviews usually took place in the interviewee’s home and lasted for periods of one to four hours, with longer interviews taking place over two meetings.

The enthusiastic response from potential and actual contributors to this project points to the continuing significance of mid-twentieth-century decisions to emigrate or stay-put in structuring subjectivity in Ireland at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The project's focus on memories of the 1950s, moreover, struck a chord with many of those over 65 years of age who articulated an urgent desire to challenge what they saw as a collective amnesia with regard to Ireland in the middle decades of the last century.

Life narratives, as Sally Alexander argues, tell us 'something of what has been forgotten in cultural memory' because they 'always describe or rehearse a history full of affective subjectivity'.<sup>8</sup> They also give us access to what Foucault calls 'subjectification': this includes evidence for the ways in which human beings 'turn themselves into subjects and actively initiate their own self-formation into meaning-giving selves'.<sup>9</sup> In addition, they provide clues to the nature of remembering and how it 'binds individuals into subjectivities and collectivities'.<sup>10</sup> However, in order to remember, it is necessary to locate memories within 'meaningful narrative sequences'.<sup>11</sup> The flux of memories is brought into a meaningful framework through narrative, which also makes events '*memorable* over time' and produces a '*shareable world*'.<sup>12</sup> Narrative is, therefore, central to memory, subjectivity and community. However, only some narratives are permissible or 'tellable' at specific moments in time.<sup>13</sup> The narratives discussed in this chapter are narrated by Mary who emigrated to the USA from Co Clare and returned after twelve years, and by Annie, who is from Co Cavan and who stayed in Ireland despite her desire to emigrate. I have chosen these women's accounts because they both come from counties that experienced high out-migration in the 1950s,<sup>14</sup> and because as narratives of staying-put, emigration and return, they offer important points of contrast and comparison. Also, as narratives of women's lives they help to address the relative absence of women's experiences of emigration and staying-put in popular and academic literature. My aim here is not to assume the coherence of the category 'women', or the homogeneity of women's experience, but rather to consider the conditions of narration and the kinds of Irish female narratives rendered 'tellable' at the turn of the twenty-first century. Before considering the narratives themselves, however, I want to discuss the recent cultural turn to memory and its relationship to changing notions of the self.

### **Memory, narrative and subjectivity at the beginning of the twenty-first century**

Memory and remembering as collective and individual practices took on new significance in the West in the latter decades of the twentieth century, prompting a considerable amount of critical and theoretical attention, much of which locates this renewal of interest in personal and collective memory within specific theorisations of social change. My aim in this part of the chapter is to briefly address three approaches to the theorisation of memory, biography and the self. The first of these is the view of sociologists such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, who regard 'biographical autonomy' as a central characteristic of the late modern self.<sup>15</sup> The second is the argument posited by Andreas Huyssen and others that fragmented narratives of the self are produced by globalising technologies and amnesiac consumer culture.<sup>16</sup> Thirdly and finally, I wish to examine the assertion that contemporary concerns with memoir and testimony represent a kind of superficial feminised culture.

If in modernity 'we are fated to be free' then, in Weberian terms, we become responsible for the consequences of our actions and our life-course has to 'be ordered by ourselves'.<sup>17</sup> Late modernity, identified with Western societies in the latter part of the twentieth century, is characterised by increased individualisation and a fragmentation of traditional categories of belonging. Individualisation, understood as the compulsion to create and manage one's own biography at a time when most aspects of life become options amongst numerous possibilities, is identified by some sociologists as a central feature of contemporary social change.<sup>18</sup> The individual is seen as gaining primacy over community with the effect that 'biographical autonomy' becomes the central attribute of the late modern subject. Thus, Giddens argues that the self is a reflexive project in so far as 'we are not what we are but what we make of ourselves', and goes on to claim that because the individual is confronted by rapid social change, personal meaninglessness becomes a problem of late modernity, to which tradition and memory are posited as potential solutions.<sup>19</sup>

According to this view, the individual is engaged in a constant process of self-monitoring and an integrated sense of self is produced through narrative. As Giddens explains: 'A reflexively ordered narrative of self-identity provides the means of giving coherence to the finite lifespan, given changing external circumstances'.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the perceived decline in the significance of categories of identity such as class, gender, nation and religion is understood as progressively releasing the individual from external forms of authority which, the argument goes, are being replaced by the authority of the individual who is involved in an ongoing process of self-invention.<sup>21</sup> In the context of late modernity, then, 'the standard biography becomes a chosen biography'.<sup>22</sup> As globalisation, consumer culture and individualisation become more characteristic of Irish society in the early 2000s, similar analyses are being applied to 'Celtic Tiger' Irish subjectivities.<sup>23</sup> My discussion of the two life narratives below both challenges and supports this sociological characterisation of biography and the late modern self. In line with this argument, a 'traditional' Catholic morality is invoked in one of the narratives, not as emanating from a church- or family-based authority, but as a reflexively chosen mode of Irish femininity. Yet, both narratives also point to the continuing operation of 'traditional' categories of gender and class in regulating available feminine selves.

Theorists of postmodernity posit the fragmented, dispersed self as its exemplary subject.<sup>24</sup> This is often linked to new modes of remembering. Huyssen argues that in a postmodern world, memory works in fragmentary and chaotic ways, rather than in the consistent mode of memory associated with nation-state modernity. In the Irish context, Roy Foster argues that the memory frame of the national liberation narrative is being replaced by the 'presentism' of memoir, heritage and commemoration culture, practices of remembering which, he argues, involve new modes of memory regulation, including the celebration of only certain forms of memoir and a selective approach to the past.<sup>25</sup> The presentism of public culture in early-twenty-first-century Ireland is also associated with the amnesia of televisual instant entertainment and the spread of a consumer culture now saturated with images of 'how young Ireland shops, dines and plays'.<sup>26</sup> In his discussion of stories and changing modalities of memory, Richard Kearney suggests that in the 'cyber world of the third millennium' we are encountering the end of the story, which is displaced by depthless simulation, chat shows, parody and pastiche.<sup>27</sup> This culture is seen as surrendering the individual to an eternal presentness marked by moments of

transience and the instantaneous, so that notions of a unified self and narrativised self-identity have to be revised.<sup>28</sup> Kearney argues that a ‘vulgarisation’ of intimacy and privacy via television chat shows and radio phone-ins means that the human need ‘to say something meaningful in a narratively structured way’ is being continually undermined.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, however, Kearney is optimistic that new technologies and fragmented modes of remembering, rather than heralding the end of the narrative, will produce new relationships between memory and narrative, and with them ‘alternative possibilities of narration’.<sup>30</sup> George Marcus implies a similar synergy between new technologies and autobiographical genres. He argues that in ‘the electronic information age’ individual autobiography and personal testimony have gained new significance because they communicate historical experiences in personalised and accessible ways. Collective representations, he argues, are ‘most effectively filtered through personal representations’ at a time when ‘the long-term memory function of orality and story-telling’ is being displaced.<sup>31</sup> So while postmodern theorists of memory and the self suggest fragmentation, inconsistency and presentism, theorists such as Kearney and Marcus see technologically mediated postmodern societies as holding the potential for new modes of memory, narration and the self to emerge.

The proliferation of memoirs and media programmes based on personal testimony is also identified in different ways with feminine modes of telling and with forms of feminist politics.<sup>32</sup> Nancy K. Miller draws attention to the ‘ambiguous back and forth between lives and stories, between experience and history’ that has been central to the development of feminism, but which has also, perhaps in less positive ways, fed into ‘the evolution of confessional culture in the nineties more generally’.<sup>33</sup> The project of making the private public has, she suggests, contributed to transformations in women’s lives since the 1960s, though it is easily denigrated as part of what has developed into a ‘climate of over-the-top self-revelation’ at the turn of the century.<sup>34</sup> Miller argues that autobiography, memoir, confession and life-telling are all genres of our contemporary culture, but that we need to be able to distinguish between the different sites and practices of these genres and their disparate effects. In an attempt to recover some of the potential for what she calls the ‘memoir boom’, Miller suggests that this should not be understood ‘as a proliferation of self-serving representations of individualistic memory but as an aid or a spur to keep cultural memory alive [...]. Indeed, the point of memoir [...] is to keep alive the notion that experience can take the form of art and that remembering is a guide to living’.<sup>35</sup>

In the first view presented above, the late modern self is recognised by biographical autonomy and an ability to create and recreate narratives of the self. The second, postmodern perspective suggests that we live in an amnesiac, ‘infotainment’ culture in which narratives of the self are fragmented, superficial and transient. This view posits contemporary subjectivity in terms of psychic discontinuity and incoherence, but also opens up new practices of memory and self-narration. The third position identifies a turn to memory and memoir as both features of confessional culture and modes of political claims-making that often centre on keeping cultural memory alive. But what is central to all three of these perspectives is the complex and changing relationship between memory and the self, as indeed it is to the *Breaking the Silence* project. Not only can the project be seen as symptomatic of a

confessional culture, it can also be said to be simultaneously reinforcing the 'biographical autonomy' that Giddens identifies with late modernity and producing an accessible mode of memory in response to the amnesiac culture discussed by Huyssen.<sup>36</sup> More importantly, perhaps, the project offers the opportunity to scrutinise the presentation and uses of memory and self-narration in early twenty-first-century Ireland. If historians make 'the memory of the past "as it was" [...] the watchword of their vocation',<sup>37</sup> this project represents a *fin-de-siècle* paradigm shift towards the workings of memory in the present and practices of remembering and forgetting.

In the discussion of the two life narratives that follows, I consider the relationships between modes of remembering, narration and the self, and examine such questions as how, in the early 2000s, these women 'step into the landscape' and see themselves as women who, in the 1950s, stayed or emigrated and returned.<sup>38</sup> I ask what kinds of femininity were enabled or prohibited for women coming to maturity in the 1950s, at a time when migration was an accepted route to adulthood as well as a necessary means of individual, familial and national survival. What devices are used to narrate memories of staying and going in the 1950s? In what ways are Irish feminine selves constituted over time in these narratives?

### **Cultural imperatives of femininity and the migrant/returned self**

Mary was born in 1934 and grew up in a village in Co Clare, the eldest of 13 children, one of whom died as a child.<sup>39</sup> She explains: 'By the time that I went to America in '53, I was 19 and my baby brother was only six months, that would give you an idea'. When she left primary school at 15, having stayed on until eighth class, she went to work in the local box factory, her earnings of 'seventeen and sixpence a week' representing a significant contribution to the family income. The early parts of her narrative are marked by a profound sense of kinship between the USA and Ireland. Her mother's stories of an aunt who returned from the US to rear her and her siblings after her mother died, and of another emigrant aunt who 'used to send them home barrels of food [...], barrels of American Beauty apples [...], barrels of bacon', render America an outpost of family and home in Mary's childhood imagination. And while she herself did not articulate a desire to go to America, emigration eventually became an option for her about three and half years after she began work at the factory.

Around this time, a letter arrived from her mother's cousins in New York 'stating that they would like to bring the oldest member of the family to America, which turned out to be me'. In response to a question about her reaction, Mary said: 'I always thought about America because my mother had it instilled in us [...]. It was always felt in our house that there was a great safety by going to America, there was no worry [...] no matter how far away it was'. As the eldest of the family, Mary was identified as the one to go, a decision made by others on her behalf. This proposal was normalised by her mother's stories of family in America and the generalised sense ('it was always felt in our house') that the US was a part of their lives. Moreover, when compared with staying on at the factory, the opportunity of going to America made emigration virtually inevitable, even though Mary had never been any further than Ballybunion in Kerry. It took six months to organise her papers, for which she had to go to the US Embassy in Dublin, which was, she recalls, 'like another world'. The date of her departure and travel arrangements were

also decided by Mary's relatives in America: they 'had booked me to travel on [...] the *SS Georgic*, and that was going off from Cobh on the 7th of August [1953]'.

Mary's narrative of leaving has the quality of a film script in which she plays the role of the emigrant in an extended familial plot. She remembers that she left Cobh on a Friday, because meat wasn't allowed, and that her mother bought her a tin of salmon for the trip, thus ensuring that this smell would forever evoke the day when her status changed from that of an embodied and recognised member of a family and community to that of another anonymous emigrant: 'All you've to do to me is mention salmon, and I can describe one day in my life from early morning, until that night – just the smell of salmon'. The initial sense of depersonalisation that resulted from her being identified as the one to go was compounded by the insensitive nature of her departure. Mary's account of leaving Cobh holds little of the romance of a stereotypical scene of emigrant departure. There are no farewells or defining moments of sorrow or excitement, only a sense of a young woman surrendering in stages to the deterministic imperatives of emigration:

The tender was going out at a certain time [...]. There was a kind of galvanised shed, and once you went inside that door, that was closed, and that was good-bye then to your family, they were gone. And you were there amongst the crowd waiting to go on this tender [...] They opened up a hatch, a door, and they put a ramp from the *Georgic* to the tender and we went up on that [...]. They hustle you in, they don't care, they were English; it was an English boat [...] and we were given a cup of tea, and it was my first time in my life seeing a roll [...]. A white roll was put on a plate and we all got a cup of tea, a roll and a piece of butter.

Mary here explains her sense of loss and depersonalisation in terms of the nationality of the (English) ship rather than the socio-political conditions that produced mass emigration. Food again assumes symbolic value, as the white roll, like many of her experiences of emigration, becomes both a source of pleasure and a reminder of her disconnection from all that is familiar. But whereas the scene of departure is evacuated of romance, the moment of arrival is saturated with stereotypical images of the American Dream and anticipation of a new life in the 'promised land'.

Mary's arrival in New York harbour coincided with her attending Mass on the ship:

We were docking on Saturday morning [...]. We had Mass [...] because it was a holy day, the 15th of August [...]. I can remember well standing up for the gospel inside at Mass and looking out the window, and I can never forget the sun as long as I live. It was huge, and the colour of it. I never saw a sun like that here [...]. And right behind the sun as we came up along into New York harbour, we passed the Statue of Liberty. You know, you don't forget the likes of that, you just don't [...]. We had no interest in Mass at that time I can tell you, it was just looking up at this beautiful symbol of liberty and freedom and welcoming, it was beautiful.

Breda: And what did you think it would bring you?

Mary: Fulfilment I suppose. A nice way of life. But that is there, there is no denying that, there is a nice way of life in America. Their standard of living is superior to the rest of the world I think.

Symbols of the American Dream here vie with the Mass for Mary's attention, but there is no contest. The morning sun and the Statue of Liberty are described in heavenly terms as emblems of beauty, liberty, freedom, a warm welcome and the prospect of a fulfilling life. At this moment in Mary's narrative, her identification with America and the American Dream seems complete. Almost immediately, however, this harmony is threatened by the question about what she thought America would bring her. To answer it, she has to overlook her own difficulties in settling there (articulated earlier and later in the narrative) in order to maintain the notion of America as a land of opportunity which offers 'a nice way of life'. The physical discomfort of wearing the heavy suit sent to her by her relatives introduces a further note of uncertainty and ambivalence:

So here I landed on the 15th of August in a heat wave with a woollen suit on. And if I was naked I'd have been warm, you know. But to have the nervousness of meeting them, that clammy feeling in my body, and I couldn't wait to get home to get off these clothes [...]. One of my aunts, I can remember her saying to me, 'Now Mary, it is the month of August, and don't think for one minute that you won't need a winter coat'. So she said, 'You'd better buy your winter coat now while the sales are on'. I didn't know what a sale was.

This uncomfortable scene of arrival is another defining moment of depersonalisation for Mary because her relatives are not expecting to recognise her but the suit she is wearing. Dress here does not function as 'a gesture of independence'<sup>40</sup> and self-definition, as in many women's narratives of the self, but rather as a sign that she had followed her relatives' emigration plan and successfully negotiated her passage. Thus, her aunt's advice to buy a winter coat is both a reminder that the New York to which she has come never stays the same and that clothes have a functional purpose.

The America of Mary's mother's stories and of her childhood imagination was not the America of her migrant experience. Her first job was in an insurance company in Newark, New Jersey. She later moved to New York to be near friends and got a job with Blue Cross health insurance, where there were other Irish workers. However, she found it hard to settle down and notes that after a few years, when none of her siblings had followed her to the US, she resolved to return to Ireland. Just after she bought her return ticket, however, she met her future husband who was also from Clare. They were married in New York and had two children there before finally returning to Ireland for good in 1965, by which time three of Mary's siblings had emigrated to the US.

In response to my question about what changes she found on her first visit home in 1960, Mary described her shock at the lack of acknowledgement of the money and parcels she had sent home in the intervening seven years:

Instead of buying a winter coat, I sent home packages. I wasn't in America two months when they had a package at home. And at that time you had to go to the store, and you had to get a cardboard box, you had to buy brown paper, you had to buy twine. You had to go to the post office and get the tags that you'd put on the packages [...] The post offices in New York are

only about every ten blocks or so [...] and many a time I took a package and I had to carry it myself. And the maximum weight was 22 lbs to send to Ireland, and many a time I had to bring them back again, open them up and take out some of the clothes [...]. But then I landed home in 1960 and I find that every single one of my younger [family] members, I expected them to say ‘thanks Mary’. Never. This is the one thing I noticed in 1960, they had too much compared to what we had, they didn’t appreciate what we had sent from America. They really didn’t.

This account suggests that in a period of seven years, Mary’s family in Ireland had become ‘other’. ‘They’ had ‘too much’, otherwise they would have been appreciative of her efforts to support them from abroad. Her detailed description of the work involved in sending parcels home is a reminder of the assumed purpose of her emigration in the first place, which was so ‘naturalised’ that it did not require recognition. It also points to how quickly a complex cultural ‘time-warp’ emerges between emigrant and non-emigrant experiences.

Mary finally realised her desire to return to Ireland to live when she refused to go back to the United States after a holiday in 1965. She notes: ‘I suppose we had a silent pact that we’d love to go home for good’, and describes arriving back in Ireland as follows:

The day I landed, I found myself, I could be myself. I suppose I am so Irish to the core, you know.

Breda: What does that mean?

Mary: It was like as if when you live in a foreign country, you are conscious of being different, and you mix with so many different nationalities that you have to have a certain level of pretence, or to live up to their expectations you know [...]. By going to America I became very broad-minded [...]. I know if I had stayed in Ireland I would have been very narrow-minded. I always knew that, because people were held down [...], from your parents to what they expected you not to do, to the parish priest who was the ruler of the parish [...]. Emigration showed both of us [she and her husband] what we were capable of and it proved that we were capable of anything.

If Mary’s narrative of emigration is marked by inevitability, depersonalisation and non-recognition, her narrative of return is one of coming into her own – becoming herself. The ‘homeland’ is constructed as a place of familiarity and authenticity, and she articulates a sense of unity between her sense of self and the larger abstraction, Ireland, which connotes cultural recognition, belonging and security. Her encounter with difference in America is seen as opening up horizons and revealing her potential, so that she comes ‘home’ a changed Mary to a familiar Ireland that reinforces her sense of herself as ‘Irish to the core’. Her encounter with difference also necessitated a working at belonging ‘as different’ that is not seen as necessary in Ireland. Yet, the narrow confines of Irish belonging policed by family and church during the 1950s represent ‘unhomely’ aspects of Irish society that are projected onto those who stayed. Thus, her emigrant experience enables her to inhabit Ireland with new potential. However, in order to construct Ireland as a place of ‘origin’ and ‘homeland’ where she doesn’t have to work at fitting in, cultural difference and change have to be evacuated from the space of Ireland.

In nearly all of the life narratives archived by this project, the concluding sections are marked by an attempt to bridge the gap between the narrated events and the storytelling event, between the then and the now. In Mary's case, her concluding reflections on her life invoke a moral discourse of Irish femininity which reveals the kinds of self-monitoring practices that she directs towards herself in order to produce herself as a 'good' woman:

Our parents, they loved us, they took good care of us, but I think myself they were a bit over-protective. When I think of how innocent I was at 19, going to America [...]. I was let go out into the wild, wild world so innocent, you know. [...] Speaking now as a girl, I was never told the facts of life. Never. But I had the instinct not to do wrong, and that was all I needed. I didn't have to be told anything. But once you know that you don't do wrong, you are protected right there. And all of my friends were the very same [...] we'd go to dances and we always knew who to avoid [...]. And the different life we have today. Okay, it's a different society, but I still don't think it's right. I honestly think a girl is demeaning herself, the fellas will take advantage at any time of a girl. I don't care who he is.

Young Irish femininity in the 1950s is constructed here through discourses of innocence and sexual self-regulation. Innocence, as Gráinne O'Flynn argues, was the 'leading female characteristic and mode of action' associated with ideal Irish womanhood in the mid-twentieth-century.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the instinct 'not to do wrong' was produced at the time by educational messages and other public discourses which framed the female body as dangerous.<sup>42</sup> Young women's practices of self-surveillance included knowing 'who to avoid' and how to 'stand firm' while remaining ignorant/innocent of matters of sex and sexuality - practices which are represented as 'second nature' in Mary's narrative. However, the moral authority of these discourses depended on the everyday rituals, statements and rules of church, school and family which produced in some young women what appeared to be a 'natural' sense of self-monitoring and sexual restraint. At the time, the apparent 'naturalness' of these gendered imperatives was underpinned by the social concealment of women who became pregnant outside of marriage via emigration or their institutionalisation in Mother and Baby Homes.<sup>43</sup>

The repression of female sexuality by constructing it as a threat, therefore, becomes a naturalised disposition that is learned, embodied and internalised through 'socially prescribed narratives and performances'.<sup>44</sup> Yet while Mary's narrative identifies church and family as reproducing narrow-mindedness and constraint, this interpretation does not extend to their roles in reproducing Irish femininity as pure, asexual and maternal. It is Irish women's sexual practices that come to mark both social change and continuity of the self in Mary's story. Ireland is recognised as 'a different society' now because of young women's sexually active lifestyles. Thus, the idea of women's bodies and sexuality as vulnerable to exploitation and in need of regulation by women themselves represents a 'truism' that links her past and present selves. As in many of the other archived narratives, women are implicitly assumed to be the guardians of society's morals both in the past and in the present. And despite her invocation of the sexual 'order of things' as a marker of continuity, it is notable that Mary's relationship to sexuality is portrayed as a reflexive one, framed by a discourse of 'choice' between the different possibilities of Irish femininity and sexuality available to women at the time of her narration.

### **Narrating ‘home’, femininity and staying-put**

Annie was born the second of six children in 1931 in rural Co Cavan.<sup>45</sup> At the time she narrated her life story, she described herself as a retired farmer and widowed mother of six children, and her parents as ‘small farmers up on the mountain’. One of her sons was killed in a tractor accident when he was eight years old. Besides her account of his death, the most poignant narrative moments are those in which she describes her adoption at the age of six by a childless aunt and uncle.<sup>46</sup> One day in December 1937, Annie and her older brother John returned from school to find that their mother and three younger siblings were missing. When her father did not answer her questions as to where they were, a neighbour informed her that her mother was alright but gone away for a while and that her siblings were with a neighbour. She heard later in her life that her mother had been admitted to hospital with post-natal depression. Annie’s aunt and uncle had offered to adopt her younger brother Joe, but because he refused, Annie offered to go instead. She recalls:

And I went, sad though, wasn’t it? And I never went back [...]. She said, ‘Will you go?’, and I said, ‘I will’. But I had no shoes, and John said, ‘I will give you my boots’. I got John’s new boots to go to Mass, and I’d wear them to second Mass and he’d wear them to first Mass. I remember I put on the boots and couldn’t get away quick enough in case he changed his mind and took them back. That is the truth, and I can remember that so well, it was a very trying thing, it was very sad. So I went there, and stayed there. Then I used to hear the people [...] saying, ‘Mrs McGarry<sup>47</sup> you have a big child’. She had no family of her own, they were the same as my mum and dad to me [...]. I always said if I had twenty children I wouldn’t let one of them go, but they were so good to me.

This recollection conveys the confusion of feelings that Annie associates with her six-year-old self: sadness about the circumstances of her leaving; responsibility for and indebtedness to her aunt and uncle; and anger at her parents for letting her go. Her brother’s generosity in giving his boots to her adds to the poignancy of her leaving her family, and deepens her guilt about taking his boots when her aunt and uncle gave her so much. Like Mary’s narrative, Annie’s is marked by the workings of obligation and loss. The obligation to be the adopted one not only meant the loss of her family and ‘home’, but also of her personal identity when she found herself ‘standing in’ for her aunt’s child. This experience in turn produced a longing to be reunited with her family and a simultaneous indebtedness to her aunt and uncle.

Later in the narrative Annie describes leaving school at 14 because her aunt was ill, and her subsequent attempts to emigrate:

Breda: How come you thought of going to America?

Annie: My mum would say ‘You would be better to go to America than working there [with her aunt and uncle] all of the time’. I was dying to go myself. My aunt, a sister of my mother’s, sent the papers over to home. I had papers ready to go to London to be a nurse in England, and she got the letter and was mad.

Breda: So you were thinking of going to England as well?

Annie: I would have loved to be a nurse, a maternity nurse, and still to this day, if I could have, that was a job I would have loved to do [...]. I got forms. It would be advertised. I would get forms and the letters would come and my aunt would give out to me about it, and not to go, so it ended up I stayed [...]. I was half afraid that when I went to England I wouldn't be able to do it. Fear. I left home when I was six and that loneliness – it is hateful being on your own [...]. She didn't want me to go and if things went sour, how would I get back?

Breda: The next option was America, and what happened about that?

Annie: My aunt said not to go and to stay on, and whatever they had, they'd give it to me. She asked what would happen to her, and put her arms around me and I stayed. If I promised something I would never go back on it. I could never understand promising things and going back on it. All the years I said to myself I wished I had gone to America.

If one of the promises of modernity is that it is possible to transcend everyday life to find something special,<sup>48</sup> then this promise is located in the USA and England at this point in Annie's narrative. Emigration is constructed here as a desirable route to personal and professional fulfilment, part of the impetus for which, interestingly, comes from Annie's mother. By contrast, staying is constructed as a matter of obligation, entrapment and missed opportunities. But staying also represents security and belonging, while the prospect of emigration produces a fear of the unfamiliar. Having lost her first home at six, Annie's desire to emigrate is tempered by a fear of losing another home if her plans go awry. 'Home' is therefore an unstable phenomenon in Annie's narrative, one which is continually subject to renegotiation. Furthermore, the fact that her narrative is structured around the opposition between familial duty and individual desire, with the former taking moral precedence over the latter, means that her obligation as an adopted daughter is invoked as the moral justification for giving up opportunities to emigrate and to train as a nurse. Instead, she takes on the burden of being 'a good daughter',<sup>49</sup> who will remain loyal to her adoptive parents and repay them for bringing her up. Staying therefore becomes a matter of keeping a promise and keeping a 'home' for herself, though it continues to be inflected by a lingering desire to emigrate.

The dominance of family survival and 'home' as cultural devices that give meaning to staying-put in Annie's narrative mean that personal longings and desires, although available as modes of articulating the self, are ultimately subordinated to the interests of the family and 'home':

Breda: Do you still wish you'd gone to America?

Annie: No not one bit, I love the children, and if I'd have gone to America, I'd have had no children, no husband. For 41 years I was happy as Larry and [there were] times when I hadn't a shilling [...]. I never knew what it was to be unhappy.

Whereas emigration had the potential to lift Annie's life out of the drudgery of hard work and poverty earlier in her narrative, hardship, staying-put and family here become the resources upon which she draws to narrate a sense of contented selfhood in the year 2000. Emigration to England or America might fulfil desires for excitement and career opportunities, but it is not seen as offering much

potential for marriage and family. Indeed, Annie's emigrant peers are invoked as evidence that, in the end, she made the better choice by staying:

They'd [emigrant friends] talk about the great time they had away. I'd be surprised then at the men they ended up with. I would then think to myself 'Did I miss much?'[...]. They would say 'I am married, I am separated, but I don't mind'. I'd hate that. I'm glad I did that [stayed] [...]. I made her [her aunt] happy, and didn't build up her hopes that when she was dead and gone that no one could care for her. I never regret that. I have good health myself, the children were good, and I got what I wanted from life.

Annie's loyalty to her aunt extends beyond her aunt's lifetime because, by inheriting and running the farm, Annie sees herself as memorialising her. Moreover, the tensions around the decision to stay are reconciled by taking up the subject positions of 'good daughter' and 'good wife and mother', and by constructing emigrant women as failing in the domains of marriage and family. Her childhood loss of home and family is counterbalanced by her successful creation of her own home and family in adulthood. Similarly, her desires to be a maternity nurse and to go to America are repressed at the moment that family in Ireland is embraced as a sign that staying was the best decision. Indeed, staying can only be articulated as the better option by portraying her emigrant peers as losing out in the areas of marriage and family. The 'great time they had away' as Annie sees it, came at the cost of losing 'Irish' family values. This othering of the emigrant may be adopted as a strategic means of allowing the non-migrant self to be positively narrated and is common to many of the narratives of staying-put in the archive.<sup>50</sup>

A reflective meta-narration takes place towards the end of Annie's story in which she positions the storytelling event in relation to the events narrated.<sup>51</sup> Reflecting on emigration as a significant aspect of her own life, but also of the community, she states:

I miss all the people I knew that are gone and there is no one to listen, they [the young generation] can't understand you. I think they are ashamed to think the people were poor [...]. To a certain extent, the people who never had to emigrate; they are lucky. You hear people say, 'I didn't go'. I'd have loved to go. But, yet I am happy with what I did do, had no worry in the world. You've no regrets and don't know much about the modern life in foreign countries either.

Annie's desire to tell her story was partly motivated by her sense that in 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland nobody wanted to hear about 'old times'. The story-telling event therefore presents an opportunity to bring her memories of times past into the present, and to reconcile her original desire to emigrate in the 1950s with the lingering remnants of that desire in the present. But tensions remain, and emerge above in the shift from the first- to the second-person to articulate the absence of regrets about staying in Ireland. The risks that emigration represented in young adulthood were avoided by staying with the known and familiar. Indeed, Annie's decision to stay is couched in terms of knowing her 'place' in the world, which she locates in the familiar environs of Cavan rather than the 'modern' milieux of 'foreign countries'. At this point in her narrative Annie takes control of the past in order to reconcile it with a present self, so that 'the past becomes grounds for the

present truth of self'.<sup>52</sup> Yet despite this attempt at narrative continuity and closure, the present 'truth of the self' remains ambiguous.

In both of the oral life histories discussed here, particular versions of 1950s Irish femininity are narrated, the most obvious being the 'good daughter' who knew her place in relation to family duty, sexuality and personal desire. Indeed, the figure of the 'good daughter' emerges as a central device in accounting for both the migrant and the non-migrant self. In each case, individual desire and agency bend to the moral demands of family obligation and the apparent inevitability of staying or emigrating. By the 2000s, however, both women's self-articulation has more to do with the notion of a chosen self and an emphasis on family as an important marker of a successful life as a woman in Ireland. This shift from 'good daughter' to 'good wife and mother' enables a continuity of the self, despite the many discontinuities that mark both life narratives. The adoption of morally evaluative relationships to other women – emigrant women in Annie's account and young women in contemporary Ireland in Mary's – further facilitates the narration of a coherent sense of self. 'Biographical autonomy' is achieved therefore through adherence to dominant disciplinary practices of Irish femininity and the construction of 'others' in the narration of a chosen self.

Belonging is imagined in these narratives as extending beyond Ireland, taking in America and Britain as possible locations of personal and professional fulfilment. Indeed, notions of 'home' emerge as the product of historical and contemporary encounters of staying, migration, arrivals and returning. But, despite this transnational and mobile imagining of belonging, a division arises between a 'familiar' Ireland and 'foreign' emigrant destinations. Although both narratives suggest that 'home' and belonging have to be worked at, they are also marked by a desire for attachment based on an uncomplicated familiarity. In Annie's account in particular, threats to this familiarity are located in the 'foreign' journeys of emigrants and the bodies and practices of emigrants themselves. Both of these women step into the landscape of early-twenty-first-century Irish femininities and see themselves as self-styled repositories of older, more 'traditional' femininities and family values. In both accounts, emigration and staying-put authorise these feminine selves in remarkably similar ways, in that these processes are woven into narratives of successful Irish femininity based on duty, obligation and the reproduction of family.

### **The orally narrated self and the autobiographical self**

In the final section of this chapter I wish to consider the oral life narrative as a genre that is both similar to and different from written autobiography. My aim is to reflect on the multiple relationships between 'experience' and life narrative, between oral history and its representation in transcript form, and between the orally narrated self and the autobiographical self. As Ken Plummer reminds us, the narrative of a life 'is not the life', and the occasions of telling and the conventions of narration shape the life stories more than 'the contours of the life as lived'.<sup>53</sup> This is certainly true of the two narratives discussed above. In each case, what is remembered and narrated is not just an experience or an event, 'but a socially prescribed mode of interpreting' an experience or event, so that it is narrated using prevailing moral norms and accepted causal discourses.<sup>54</sup> Yet it is important not to totally collapse experience into discourse.<sup>55</sup> Shari Stone-Mediatore, for example,

warns against understanding experience as ‘a mirror of available discourses [...] with no excess’,<sup>56</sup> and Avtar Brah reminds us that discursive categories work through embodied living subjects who experience them as ‘realities’ and therefore in excess of discourse. As Brah points out, at any point in time, ‘the subject-in-process experiences itself as the “I”, and both consciously and unconsciously replays and resignifies positions in which it is located and invested’.<sup>57</sup> In the case of Mary and Annie, their narratives force us to engage with the relationships between emigration, the family and disciplinary practices of femininity in modern Ireland. They also revise the accepted relationships between emigration, memory and subjectivity by highlighting the mutual othering of emigrant and non-emigrant women, the silences that imperatives of family loyalty impose, and the operation of gendered modes of remembering in reproducing continuity of the self.

Life narratives and autobiographies, therefore, follow the conventions of narration but are not contained by them. Furthermore, although oral narrative conventions structure life narratives and autobiography, interpretation in the case of each of these genres involves different considerations. While matters of form and style are central to analyses of written autobiographies, in oral life narratives it is the occasion of the telling that assumes greatest significance.<sup>58</sup> This is because the oral life narrative is a staged performance framed by a verbal exchange between two or more people. It requires the presence of a subject/narrator and an interviewer/researcher, so that the narration is jointly produced. Interpretation begins when the project is conceived by the researcher and proceeds during the process of collecting the oral narratives. In the process, the life narrative is materialised by a recording on tape and embedded in a wider interpretive context by the institutional frameworks and discourses that frame both the narration and the recording.<sup>59</sup>

The first person to speak is usually the interviewer who, in the case of the *Breaking the Silence* project, began with the question: ‘Where were you born?’ By opening the conversation, Alessandro Portelli argues that it is the interviewer who ‘establishes the basis of narrative authority’.<sup>60</sup> In the case of the two narratives discussed above, both women responded to local newspaper articles about the project, each linking the article contents to their lives and feeling strongly that they had stories to tell. In both cases the telling took place during a single interview, so that each of these narratives is the result of one occasion of telling. Although responding to a public request to take part in a project about emigration and staying-put, the memory frames<sup>61</sup> of the narrators often touched on life events that were unrelated to these subjects during the narration itself. However, the researchers’ concern with leaving and staying nudged the narrators’ dominant memory frames towards engagement with memories of the 1950s and decisions to stay or to go. Thus, the resultant narrative is determined by the context of telling, which includes the interviewer’s research frame,<sup>62</sup> the narrator’s memory frame, the institutional context of the research, and the immediate and anticipated audience.

It is also important to note that the occasion of narrating a life often takes place in a different ideological context from that of the actual events being narrated. Mary and Annie, for example, both narrated their 1950s experiences in the socio-cultural context of Ireland in the early 2000s. Richard Hoggart argues that for working-class communities in Britain, the 1950s represented a time when most people lacked a sense that some change could or ‘ought to be made in the general pattern of life’.<sup>63</sup>

At first reading, Mary and Annie's narratives suggest a similar fatalism about their own destinies and the possibility of change, in that their 1950s selves, as constructed through their negotiations of staying and emigrating, appear inseparable from 'the general pattern of life'<sup>64</sup> in Ireland at the time. But there are moments in each text when the self shifts outside this pattern. For example, a lived complexity emerges from Annie's account of her career and her family aspirations as inflected by her desire to emigrate, and from Mary's renegotiation of her emigrant status to bring about her return to Ireland. Nonetheless, when the ideological context has changed and 1950s concepts have lost their purchase, it is more difficult to mobilise language to account for earlier experiences.<sup>65</sup> Thus, both narratives invoke explanatory modes resonant with a 1950s ideology but which conflict with twenty-first-century discourses of individualisation predicated on 'choice'. This dissonance marks the narrated selves and reveals the social and temporal gap between the narrative events and the occasion of narration.

A further dissonance or disjunction emerges when there is a gap between the agenda of the researcher and the narrator's ability to articulate those experiences that are the object of study, or when there is an absence of language to account for specific events or experiences. A central framing agenda for the *Breaking the Silence* project was the question of how *staying* in Ireland in a period of mass emigration was experienced and remembered. However, the available cultural discourses focus on the act of emigration rather than experience of staying. The effects of this are evident in Annie's narrative, which is structured around accounts of her attempts to leave and her constructions of emigrant life and emigrants themselves. That is to say, staying as an object of reflection, or as an event within the life narrative, is constituted in Annie's story through available discourses of emigration and family. Furthermore, staying only becomes a legitimate discourse of the self at the point when she reflects on her life as daughter, wife and mother, and her location in the familiar surroundings of rural Cavan. So the absence of a discourse of staying, although a limitation when staying is the object of study, nevertheless enables a pushing at the boundaries of prevailing discourses and knowledges about emigration and Irish society.

Another feature of the oral life narrative genre relates to how oral testimony is undermined by its representation in written form. Oral narration is seen as having lost much of its authority as a result of cultural modernisation and the concomitant privileging of literacy and literature.<sup>66</sup> The impetus to textualise as a means of communication and dissemination is almost unavoidable, even in a technological age where sound recordings are more accessible. The perception remains that the meaning of a piece of communication is transmitted more quickly via textual representation. Oral life narratives force us, therefore, to confront the ways in which the literary colonises the oral.<sup>67</sup> While the oral narrative can be seen as 'an extraliterary or even antiliterary form of discourse',<sup>68</sup> it is rendered textual, if not literary, via transcription. The significance of the occasion of the telling is also undermined by the transcription into text, which is 'necessarily reductionist, a skeleton standing in for a live body'.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the transcription of the oral narrative means that the intentions and ideology of the transcriber/researcher are imposed on the narrative, thereby creating more ambiguities and absences. Thus, the transcription process produces a form of 'genre bending' as the oral narrative mutates into a kind of hybrid autobiography.

The gap between genres remains, however. In the oral life narrative, the researcher is always present as a mediator whose intentions, alongside those of the narrator, shape the telling. Furthermore, the ‘relations of production’ and the occasions of narration are necessarily more prominent features of oral life narrative than of autobiography, and the transcribed testimony is always haunted by the non-textual and extra-linguistic aspects of its oral narration.<sup>70</sup> Most academic discussions of oral narratives collude with the privileging of the textual form by proceeding from the transcription, as indeed I do in this chapter. My use of interactive extracts acts as a reminder of the dialogic context of the narration. While the above distinctions are necessary in discussing some of the differences between oral life narrative and autobiography, it is important to remember that orality and writing have co-existed for centuries. As Portelli points out: ‘If many written sources are based on orality, modern orality itself is saturated with writing’.<sup>71</sup>

The particular aesthetic and ideological power of the oral narrative is that it is elicited rather than self-initiated, making it a more ‘modest proposal’ than that of the autobiography. The oral narrator usually speaks as an informant in a research project and tends to be seen more as an ordinary witness or ‘a “real” popular voice’ than as an exceptional individual or cultural ‘hero’.<sup>72</sup> While the conventions of autobiography imply an ideology of individualisation based on a unique and coherent self, those of the oral narrative lie less in the uniqueness of the narrator than in the assumed shared experience of a wider community. This means that the individual subject is affirmed, but in a way that is more embedded in a group or class situation than may be the case in an autobiography.<sup>73</sup> To return to the life narratives, both Mary and Annie’s narratives articulated a desire to bear witness to what they saw as forgotten times and experiences of (non)migration in the 1950s. In this way, their life narratives became forms of ‘testimony’ in which their concern was not just to narrate, but to take responsibility for social events beyond their personal stories which had ‘general (non personal) validity and consequences’.<sup>74</sup>

In contrast with the individual desire that typically drives the autobiographical self,<sup>75</sup> therefore, the oral narrative is often seen as articulating modest, everyday experiences, frequently negotiated in relation to wider familial and communal concerns, as in the case of both Mary and Annie. This distinction needs to be nuanced, however. There are moments in both women’s narratives when the selves articulated are more autobiographical than plural, such as when they talk about the ways in which they as individuals have triumphed over life’s obstacles. Although articulated in the feminised terms of family and relationships, at these moments the narratives take on a tone of masculine heroic transcendence and produce the narrator in the mode of the cultural ‘hero’. This mode of transcendence can be interpreted as a conservative one that authorises situations of relative privilege and plays down the need for question or social change.<sup>76</sup> As the past becomes the grounds for the present ‘truth’ of the self, some of these adversities – whether they relate to staying-put in spite of a desire to emigrate, or to involuntary emigration – are transcended and reinvoked as resources for an achieved self anchored in family and national community. And while the testimony of the oral narrator may be interpreted as more ‘authentic’ or ‘sincere’ than that of the autobiographer, questions of audience influence both. For narrators taking part in the *Breaking the Silence* project, the prospect, in particular, of family members listening to their narratives meant that certain things remained unsaid, thereby undoing any illusion of a complete or transparent life story. As with conventional autobiography,

therefore, anticipated audiences affect the content and direction of oral life narratives as the narrator selects and orders events and experiences to create a recognisable and acceptable self.

Although my analysis in this section suggests that the boundaries of oral life narratives are blurred when compared to written autobiography, my discussion has worked towards distinguishing between the different sites and practices of these genres and their effects. Like Nancy Miller, I believe that the contemporary 'memoir boom' has some potential for making narrated remembered experience a guide to present-day living.<sup>77</sup> Life narratives also give us access to an understanding of how our relationships to ourselves are governed by prevailing norms, while simultaneously opening up unthought discursive spaces that might contest the limits that regulate what can be said or narrated.

## Conclusion

Personal memories invoke cultural, national and other collectively shared memories that offer insights into the workings of memory in the production of the self. The life narratives collected for the *Breaking the Silence* project tap into a popular memory rich in the stories of family, locality and nation, and offer unique access to the quotidian negotiations of self and identity in a cultural context of high out-migration. They identify moments of 'social specificity'<sup>78</sup> that can be mined for a rethinking of both the past and the present. Because certain languages of description, explanation and judgement come to acquire the value of 'truth', they tend to structure cultural memory and to reproduce particular forms of subjectivity. But memory and subjectivity cannot be understood only as effects of discourses. Although experience is always constructed through available social discourses, it is in the tensions between experience and discourse, and at the junctures of intersecting discourses, that the potential for unsettling accepted 'truths' emerge.

In this chapter I have examined the elusive yet pervasive presence of emigration and gender in the making of Irish cultural memory. In mid-twentieth-century Britain and Ireland, women's lives were identified primarily within the domain of domesticity and with what Alison Light calls 'conservative modernity'.<sup>79</sup> However, defining women in this way can be seen as a symptom of the gendered dynamics of modernity, which position working-class women in particularly insecure and circumscribed positions. Furthermore, since women have traditionally been 'denied the authority to define the cultural past', the remembered lives of Mary and Annie represent the 'struggle for a new way of looking back'.<sup>80</sup> And while conservative impulses are produced by this process, so too are feminist moments that can be mined for analyses of how Irish feminine selves are narrated by women themselves. In order to contest the naturalisation of Irish femininity as familial, it is necessary to understand how this operates as a discursive structure that constitutes subjective experiences of gender. In the narratives discussed here, the women are both subject to disciplinary discourses of ideal Irish femininity and able to invoke aspects of this discourse as a compensatory strategy that helps them to momentarily resolve their contradictory positioning in relation to social continuity and change in Ireland.

The selves narrated by Mary and Annie are marked by two contradictory impulses: first, the desire for a reconciliation of past and present and second, the engagement with often painful images and memories of the past which, even if not explicitly

realised in their narratives, point towards other possible selves.<sup>81</sup> Although these are narratives of dispersed and fragmented selves, towards the end of each there is a movement towards 'biographical autonomy' and a construction of unchosen life events into a chosen narrative of the self. The invocation of past experiences as contributing towards present subjectivities involves attempts to control and weave these past selves into a coherent present self. This is marked by a narrative trajectory that goes from the present to the past in order to justify the present. This mode of narrative memory 'does not yield anything new in the present. It merely reproduces the present as an effect of the past, of past causes'.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the past 'lifelessly mirrors the present, explains it to itself'.<sup>83</sup>

Yet, in both narratives there are moments from the past that are immediate in their impact and presence. In Annie's case, her adoption juts out of her past into her present as a defining moment of the self, while in Mary's narrative, the non-recognition of her provision for her family while she was an emigrant produces a potentially more reflexive relationship to family and obligation. At these narrative moments, prevailing discourses of emigration and the family come under pressure, and the resultant contradictions, tensions and silences open up new questions. At these points, there is the possibility of a return to these events in the past in order to rethink relationships to the self in the present.<sup>84</sup> This mode of engagement with the past ultimately means that it exists not to explain the present, but rather to encourage new forms of becoming, moments which can offer new starting-points for the self.

R. Perks and A. Thomson, 'Introduction', *The Oral History Reader*, ed. R. Perks and A. Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. viv-xiii.

<sup>22</sup> G. Beiner and A. Bryson, 'Listening to the Past and Talking to Each Other: Problems and Possibilities Facing Oral History in Ireland', *Irish Economic and Social History*, XXX, (2003) pp. 71-78.

<sup>3</sup> A. Thomson, 'Moving stories: oral history and migration studies', *Oral History*, 27:1 (1999), p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> E. Delaney, *Demography, State and Society. Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), chapter four. By the end of the decade, emigration stood at a rate of 14.8 per 1,000 of population, with those most likely to leave being in the 15-29 age group.

<sup>5</sup> The *Breaking the Silence* project was undertaken between 2000 and 2002 and was partly funded by the Higher Education Authority under the PRTLII initiative.

<sup>6</sup> Of those who contacted us to take part in the project, 73 were men and 43 were women. While conducting the study we tried to target more women and ensure a geographical spread. The urban/rural divide and class distribution were not easily quantifiable because of social and geographical mobility.

<sup>7</sup> This archive of 90 contributions (78 in CD-Rom, minidisk and cassette tape formats and 12 textual contributions) is located in the Boole Library, University College Cork. Unfortunately, the archive is not open to users at present because the necessary sound technology and archival support are not available. Another outcome of the project was an innovative Internet archive in real audio format of those narratives with appropriate copyright permission. This site can be accessed via <http://migration.ucc.ie/>.

<sup>8</sup> S. Alexander *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History*, (London: Virago Press, 1994), p. 234.

<sup>9</sup> M. Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* by H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) p. 208 and P. Rabinow, 'Introduction', *The Foucault Reader, An Introduction to Foucault's Thought* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> A. Kuhn 'Memory and Textuality'. Unpublished paper presented at 'Time and Value' conference, Lancaster University, 10-13 April, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> R. Kearney, *On Stories*, (London: Routledge, 2002) p.3. Original emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> K. Plummer, *Documents of Life 2: An invitation to a critical humanism* (London: Sage, 2001), p. 186.

<sup>14</sup> Cavan was sixth highest ranking county for out-migration in the 1950s [do you happen to know how Clare compared with this?].

<sup>15</sup> A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1990) and *Modernity and Self-Identity*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, (London: Sage, 1992). See also S. Lash and J. Friedman, 'Introduction: subjectivity and modernity's Other' in S. Lash and J. Friedman (eds.), *Modernity and Identity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 1-30. Giddens' analysis of individualisation and identity is a much more optimistic one than that of Bauman and Beck.

<sup>16</sup> A. Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, (New York: Routledge, 1995). See also J. Baudrillard, 'Holocaust' and 'History: A Retro Scenario' in his *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Lash and Friedman, 'Introduction', *Modernity and Identity*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> See Z. Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization* (London: Sage, 2002), Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*.

<sup>19</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 9, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 76, 215.

<sup>21</sup> L. Adkins, *Revisions: gender & sexuality in late modernity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), pp. 14-16

- <sup>22</sup> Adkins, *Revisions*, p. 16. See also U. Beck, 'The reinvention of politics: towards a theory of reflexive modernization' in U. Beck, A. Giddens and S. Lash (eds.), *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).
- <sup>23</sup> See C. Coulter and S. Coleman (eds.) *The End of Irish History?: Critical reflections on the Celtic Tiger* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
- <sup>24</sup> See J. Baudrillard, 'Holocaust' and 'History: A Retro Scenario'.
- <sup>25</sup> R. F. Foster, *The Irish Story. Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland*, (London: Allen Lane, 2001). See also B. Gray 'Global Modernities and the Gendered Epic of the "Irish Empire"' in S. Ahmed, C. Castaneda, A-M. Fortier and M. Sheller (eds.), *Uprootings/Regroundings. Questions of Home and Migration*, (Oxford: Berg, 2003) pp. 157-78
- <sup>26</sup> C. Coulter, 'The End of Irish history? An introduction to the book' in Coulter and Coleman (eds.) *The End of Irish history?*, pp. 16, 13.
- <sup>27</sup> Kearney, *On Stories*, p. 10
- <sup>28</sup> C. Lury, *Prosthetic Culture. Photography, Memory and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 106.
- <sup>29</sup> Kearney, *On Stories*, p. 10.
- <sup>30</sup> Kearney, *On Stories*, p. 12.
- <sup>31</sup> G. Marcus, 'Past, present and emergent identities: requirements for ethnographies of late twentieth-century modernity worldwide' in Lash and Friedman (eds.), *Modernity and Identity*, p. 317.
- <sup>32</sup> P. Summerfield, 'Dis/composing the subject: intersubjectivities in oral history' in T. Cosslett, C. Lury and P. Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography. Texts, Theories and Methods* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 106.
- <sup>33</sup> N. K. Miller, *But Enough About Me. Why We Read Other People's Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. xiv.
- <sup>34</sup> Miller, *But Enough About Me*, p. 1
- <sup>35</sup> Miller, *But Enough About Me*, p. 14
- <sup>36</sup> This project coincided with revelations about child abuse in reform schools and within the Catholic Church, and with the setting up of tribunals of inquiry into corruption in Irish planning, politics and business.
- <sup>37</sup> R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 15.
- <sup>38</sup> C. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (London: Virago, 1986), p. 24
- <sup>39</sup> Mary's narrative exists on CD-Rom; minidisk and cassette tape sound formats, with a textual summary, chronological log and demographic details, in the Irish Centre for Migration Studies (ICMS) *Breaking the Silence* Archive at the Boole Library. I interviewed Mary at her home in July 5 2002.
- <sup>40</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a Woman*, p. 219.
- <sup>41</sup> G. O'Flynn 'Our Age of Innocence' in M. Cullen (ed.) *Girls don't do Honours. Irish Women in Education in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Dublin: WEB, 1987), p. 79. See also Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence. Irish Culture 1930-1960* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1998), p. 193.
- <sup>42</sup> G. O'Flynn 'Our Age of Innocence', pp. 92-3.
- <sup>43</sup> See C. Callanan, *Catholic Rescue and Repatriation. Irish Unmarried Mothers in England 1950s-1970s*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, National University of Ireland, Cork, 2002. See also M. Milotte, *Banished Babies. The secret history of Ireland's export business* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1997) and P. M. Garrett, 'The abnormal flight: the migration and repatriation of Irish unmarried mothers', *Social History*, 25:3, 2000, pp. 330-43.
- <sup>44</sup> C. Bold, R. Knowles, and B. Leach, 'Feminist Memorializing and Cultural Counter-memory: The Case of Marianne's Park', *Signs* 28:1, 2002. pp. 125-47.
- <sup>45</sup> Annie's narrative exists on CD-Rom; minidisk and cassette tape sound formats, with a textual summary, chronological log, demographic details and correspondence, in the Irish Centre for Migration Studies (ICMS) *Breaking the Silence* Archive at the Boole Library. I interviewed Annie at her home on October 23 2000.

- <sup>46</sup> The death of her son in a tractor accident also haunts the narrative, especially when she reflects on her life in the present.
- <sup>47</sup> Mrs McGarry is the pseudonymous name of Annie's aunt.
- <sup>48</sup> J. Giles, 'Narratives of Gender, Class and Modernity in Women's Memories of Mid-Twentieth Century Britain', *Signs* 28:1, 2002, pp. 21-41.
- <sup>49</sup> C. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), p. 105.
- <sup>50</sup> Although those who stayed are othered in Mary's account of her first return visit, this is a temporary othering, as she eventually returns to live in Ireland. The fact that she has to incorporate both migrant and non-migrant selves into one narrative means that this dichotomy cannot work in the same way as in narratives of staying-put.
- <sup>51</sup> R. Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual studies in oral narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p 100.
- <sup>52</sup> E. Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 116.
- <sup>53</sup> Plummer, *Documents of Life 2*, p. 186. Original emphasis.
- <sup>54</sup> R. Diprose, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, embodiment and sexual difference* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 84.
- <sup>55</sup> S. Stone-Mediatore, 'Chandra Mohanty and the Revaluing of "Experience"' in U. Narayan and S. Harding (eds.), *Decentering the Center. Philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial and feminist world* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 114.
- <sup>56</sup> Stone-Mediatore, 'Chandra Mohanty and the Revaluing of "Experience"', p. 115.
- <sup>57</sup> A. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 125.
- <sup>58</sup> E. Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The social construction of oral history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 53.
- <sup>59</sup> M-F. Chanfrault-Duchet, 'Textualisation of the self and gender identity in the life-story' in *Feminism and Autobiography*, p. 62.
- <sup>60</sup> Portelli, A. *The Battle of Valle Giulia. Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 9
- <sup>61</sup> A memory frame emerges from what popular memory theorists refer to as the cultural circuit, which is a feedback loop between personal accounts and public discourse. See Summerfield, 'Dis/composing the subject', p. 95.
- <sup>62</sup> The interviewer's research frame 'influences the path through the past which the narrator takes, and requires the narrator to remember where they have been' in particular ways and within specific parameters (Summerfield, 'Dis/composing the subject', p. 95).
- <sup>63</sup> R. Hogart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 91. Quoted in Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p. 11.
- <sup>64</sup> M. Chamberlain, 'The global self: narratives of Caribbean migrant women' in *Feminism and Autobiography*, p. 161.
- <sup>65</sup> M. Michielsens, 'Memory frames: The role of concepts and cognition in telling life-stories' in *Feminism and Autobiography*, p. 184.
- <sup>66</sup> See G. M. Gugelberger's introduction to *The Real Thing. Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, ed. G. M. Gugelberger (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).
- <sup>67</sup> G. M. Gugelberger, *The Real Thing*, pp. 10-11.
- <sup>68</sup> J. Beverley, 'The Margin at the Center: *On Testimonio*' in *The Real Thing*, p. 37.
- <sup>69</sup> E. Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts*, p. 16. Portelli notes that a transcript written in a way that is 'so minutely faithful to sounds that it turns a beautiful speech into an unreadable page can hardly be described as "accurate"' (*The Battle of Valle Giulia*, p. 15). See also P. Ricoeur, 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text' in *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, eds. P. Rabinow and W. M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 73-101.
- <sup>70</sup> The dilemmas that arise with regard to representing the occasion of telling centre on the problem of weighing the text down with situational details that can render it unreadable. See Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event*.
- <sup>71</sup> A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 52.

<sup>72</sup> Beverley, 'The Margin at the Center', p. 34.

<sup>73</sup> Beverley, 'The Margin at the Center', p. 35.

<sup>74</sup> S. Feldman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 204.

<sup>75</sup> Desire is defined by Frederic Jameson as 'a virtually metaphysical preoccupation' in his 'On Literary and Cultural Import-Substitution in the Third World' in *The Real Thing*, p. 187.

<sup>76</sup> Beverley, 'The Margin at the Center', p. 36

<sup>77</sup> Miller, *But Enough About Me*, p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>80</sup> J. Haaken, *Pillar of Salt. Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back* (London: Free Association Books, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> See Probyn, *Outside Belongings* for a discussion of the latter as a strategy.

<sup>82</sup> Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, p. 117.

<sup>83</sup> Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, p. 118.

<sup>84</sup> Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, p. 118.