

I.3. *Us & Them* in the Contemporary Irish and Galician Novel

I.3.1. “There is no ‘us’”: Evelyn Conlon’s *Not the Same Sky*

Irish Diasporas

Travel, whether forced or voluntary, is one of the most propitious situations for the encounter between *us* and *them* and the subsequent interrogation of both categories. In the case of Ireland, emigration has become a constitutive feature of Irish identity and the current descendants of Irish emigrants around the world amount to millions:

Irish demographics reveal two startling facts: There are around 70 million people worldwide who claim Irish descent, and Ireland today has barely half the population that it had 160 years ago, a decline unmatched in the modern world. These facts are explained and connected by the undeniable social reality of nineteenth-century Ireland —emigration. (Hackney and Hackney Blackwell 2007: 150)

Terms such as “emigration”, “exile” and “diaspora”, each entailing different connotations and circumstances, have, however, often been used interchangeably both by the displaced people and by commentators on Irish migration flows (Delaney 2006: 35–38). Although emigration has been a widely acknowledged fact among Irish people, the government of the Irish Republic seems to have been reluctant to incorporate its diaspora as an integral part of the Irish community, as if doing so were a recognition of the state’s failure in providing for its citizens (Muldowney 2012, Delaney 2006: 38–40). An attempt to redress this glaring omission took place with President Mary Robinson’s speech “Cherishing the Irish Diaspora”, in 1995, when she delved into the relevance of emigration to the notion of Irishness:

If we expect that the mirror held up to us by Irish communities abroad will show us a single familiar identity, or a pure strain of Irishness, we will be disappointed. We will overlook the fascinating diversity of culture and choice which looks back at us. Above all we will miss the chance to have that dialogue with our own diversity which this reflection offers us. (par. 8)

According to D.A.J. MacPherson and Mary J. Hickman, the substantial advance brought about by this new attention to the Irish diaspora is its redefinition of national identity and belonging, which is now “based on diversity, multiple affiliations and multi-located identifications” (2014: 1). This chapter will analyse the novel *Not the Same Sky* (2013), by the Irish writer Evelyn Conlon, with the aim to identify the various configurations of identity produced in the process of displacement from Ireland and adaptation to the receiving society in Australia. The title of the novel itself includes the notions of difference and sameness as an avowal that both contribute to each other’s signification. The migrants in this novel, which is based on a true historical event, are a group among the 4,414 orphan girls shipped to Australia by the British government during the years of the Irish Famine in the late 1840s. The most frequent range of these girls’ ages went from sixteen to eighteen years old, and they were especially vulnerable both because they were orphans and because they had suffered severe starvation. The novel often poses the question about the girls’ capacity to choose the courses of their lives in this situation of transportation when, in fact, the alternative of staying in Ireland entailed serious risks to their survival and no adult relative could assume responsibility for them. Conlon also makes one of her characters question the term “refugees from The Great Irish Famine” branded on the girls, when in truth they were “prisoners, girl- slaves” (Conlon 2013: 238) who, upon their arrival in Australia, were assigned to the various masters who needed female workers, a situation in which, once more, the girls had no say.¹³ Evelyn Conlon’s *Not the Same Sky* is, therefore, a perfect illustration of Ellen McWilliams’ assertion that contemporary Irish fiction is recovering the story of the Irish female emigrant, a story that used to be underrepresented both in historical accounts and in literature on migration (2013: 2). The attention paid to Irish migrants in Australia also contributes to redress the balance in accounts of the Irish diaspora worldwide, as there has been a predominant scrutiny of Irish immigrants in America.

The historian Margaret Kelleher, a specialist in Irish women’s predicament through the Great Irish Famine, has described Conlon’s novel as an “affective and effective literary representation of history”

(2023: 111). Apart from a very informative discussion of various controversies around famine memorials like the one that articulates the plot of Conlon's novel, Kelleher turns to Sara Ahmed's theory of affects to discuss the emotions, such as shame, guilt or anger, that are triggered by the knowledge of past traumatic events. Furthermore, Kelleher pays attention to those narrative devices in the novel which problematize historical knowledge, as happens with the use of time shifts, partial focalization and modal verbs that "foreground the limitations of any narrative effort" (*ibid*: 119) and avoid the standardization of trauma narratives.

The Colonial Conflict

In the 1840s, Ireland was part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, as a result of the Act of Union that came into effect in 1801 with the aim to suffocate Irish resistance to British colonial power. Conlon's novel raises the issue of the colonizer's responsibility in both the famines and the schemes designed to find a solution to the problem of so many orphans precariously accommodated in workhouses in which disease and death were rampant. The novel therefore starts by presenting a clear opposition between the colonized Irish and the colonizing British with a third-person narrator's point of view that is clearly sympathetic to the Irish ordeal:

13 All quotations from *Not the Same Sky* are hereafter taken from the Wakefield Press 2013 edition and only page numbers are given.

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The resulting slow chaos grew worse until this hunger could no longer be ignored. In London many people spent time thinking about what to do. This may have included deciding to do nothing, or deciding what not to do, or deciding to put these thoughts to the back of minds, where they could not interfere with London life. (7)

The eventual decision is to send the orphan girls to Australia, where a number of penal colonies were run in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and where Irish rebels against the British colonizer were also transported to, thereby eliciting some analogies between the convicts and the girls throughout the novel: although the girls have committed no crime, one may say they are "transported" to the colony, given their impossibility to choose any other course of life; the girls are accommodated in the same barracks that had been used for convicts; some of the former convicts will become the masters of these servant girls; one of the girls finally finds her mother, an ex-convict, alive. The colonial situation in Ireland is somehow replicated in Australia as the sons of former landlords become settlers in Australia and perpetuate their exploitation of Irish people.

The novel *Not the Same Sky* is divided into thirty-five chapters, in addition to a prologue set in 2008 that does not provide the author's statement of intentions or any contextual information, as is most often the case in forewords, but is actually a fictional chapter that introduces the subject-matter of the novel through a letter sent from Australia to Joy Kennedy, a female sculptor of gravestones living in Ireland. The letter informs of the project to build, in Australia, a memorial "to the 4414 Famine Orphan Girls who were shipped here to Australia between 1848 and 1850" (2) and invites Joy to be the stonemason for that memorial. Memory will be a key theme in this novel as descendants of the orphans and the transported protagonists themselves persistently struggle to come to terms with their past and present circumstances. The past is constitutive of their identities and yet little is known about it or about them. In the presidential speech above mentioned, Mary Robinson actually referred to commemoration as a moral act: The weight of the past, the researches of our local interpreters and the start of the remembrance of the famine all, in my view, point us towards a single reality: that commemoration is a moral act, just as our relation in this country to those who have left it is a moral relationship. (par. 15)

The President of Ireland is here appealing to what Josefina Cuesta calls "historical memory", *i.e.*, a nation's use of the past, and not just an individual use (2014: 31). There is an otherness to the orphan girls' past that may well be a manifestation of trauma, as all the characters, though haunted by a past that they cannot let go, make use of different strategies to suppress it. To the Memorial Committee, formed by

descendants of the transported girls —the total number of their descendants is calculated to be around one million— and to Joy Kennedy, the stonemason, the girls are “they”, figures of a traumatic past. Joy, in particular, avows her ignorance about the girls’ ordeal: “I’ve never heard of them, have you?” (3). The following twenty-nine chapters will tell the story of the girls through the second half of the nineteenth century and the last six chapters will close the novel by returning to Joy Kennedy, in 2008, and her transformative trip to Australia to inquire about the memorial project and the orphan girls’ life stories.

Gender Matters

The novel uses the term “girls”, although in some cases these orphans were as old as twenty years of age. Although the term might risk infantilizing them all, it is used throughout the novel to refer to these dispatched females who, in some cases, were as young as fourteen. Age and gender are important factors since readers get to know how the girls cope with the changes in their bodies as they grow. Some have their first menstruation while they are on the ship, but nobody has told them why or how this happens: “She’s bleeding to death. Look at her blanket. Rose Larkin’s dying” (91). Even when told by older girls or by the matrons themselves, there is a persistent taboo about this topic: “[the matron] did not want the younger ones to know before they needed to” (92). The barracks where they are exhibited for their hiring have no provision for women’s facilities and the girls have to hide “their sanitary rags under the floorboards” (238). Furthermore, the girls’ starved bodies had not grown properly, and the novel informs us of accidents in their pregnancies because their bones are weaker than the baby in the uterus: “[...] the prevalence of spontaneous symphysiotomies at birth, the babies having grown stronger than the weak pelvises of the girl starved at a crucial bone-making time of her life” (235). Gender is an important factor that has often been neglected in migration studies, but Irish migration flows evince the conspicuous presence of emigrating women, whether single, married or widows, travelling accompanied or, more often than one might expect, alone. According to Breda Gray, “[women] emigrated in greater numbers than men in most decades since the mid-nineteenth century and left mainly as single women rather than as part of a family” (2004: 1). Their role in the economic growth of the social groups that they were part of also needs further study by the social sciences. Conlon’s novel, therefore, contributes, thanks to its literary recreation of the expedition of the orphan girls, to a better understanding of female emigration from Ireland and disseminates factual information about the Irish famines and their effect on migration flows.

One decisive issue that is raised now and then in the novel is the degree of consent or choice allowed to the girls in their transportation. Often referred to as “cargo” for the ships to carry and deliver, their human agency and personal autonomy to choose the projects they would wish to pursue is drastically curtailed. Starvation and the cramped conditions of the workhouses that shelter them also restrict their capacity to choose. The matron of the workhouse calls the names of the girls she thinks may be fit to endure the voyage and informs them she will later ask them “if they want to go” (19). A narrator using free indirect discourse speaks the girls’ minds:

They wanted to live on a patch of land nearby, to grow potatoes, or turnips even, and other produce to pay the rent. They didn’t want to be talking about places with names like America, where aunts and uncles and cousins had gone, and now Australia, which some said was in the opposite direction, and further away. (20) Certainly, the possibility to eat and survive, as well as that of having a job are the definitive and persuasive arguments for the girls to accept the scheme despite the enormous pain of leaving their siblings, their Irish whereabouts, and their memories of a past, happier childhood before the potato plagues of 1845, 1846 and 1848.

Sameness and Difference

Apart from the *us-them* opposition regarding the conflict between the British colonizers that organize this scheme and the Irish colonized that are sent to the penitentiary colony of Australia, the transportation of the girls recurrently raises comparisons and contrasts between the familiarity of Ireland as home and the uncertainty and strangeness of Australia as the destination land. The novel focuses on one voyage, that of the ship *Thomas Arbuthnot*, which departs from Plymouth on 28 October 1849 under the surveillance of a surgeon- superintendent, the Englishman Charles Edward Strutt, in charge of delivering alive the cargo of around two hundred orphan girls in Sidney three months later. That the girls should reach Australia alive was not a simple mission, since many ships were overcrowded, and the already weak migrants got

critically ill or died because of the bad sanitation and inadequate food on the ships. In emulation of the slavery ships that carried African slaves to the New Continent, those that transported the diseased Irish were also called “coffin ships”. The migrants who did not die during the voyage were likely to do so upon arrival, during the quarantine periods, or in the continuation of their journeys to the final destination (Hackney and Hackney Blackwell 2007: 154–155).

The narrator’s selective omniscience will give special attention to a few girls in order to present a variety of personalities and coping strategies: Honora Raftery, Anne Sherry, Julia Cuffe and Bridget Joyce. Of the four, Honora Raftery is the character to be explored in more detail in the novel and may be identified as the protagonist. She will also prove to be the one with the strongest attachment to her childhood memories and her homeland. For this reason, the narrator delves into her robust family bonds which, in spite of the humble means, were supportive of all the family members and neighbours and were deeply ingrained in the vernacular language and culture. Honora’s mother used to know the Brehon laws, which constituted the legal system of Celtic Ireland and regulated issues as multifarious as land disputes, theft, or marriage, but also instructed in the care of trees and animals. The children learnt to read and write in Irish but also learnt English at school. With the onset of the potato failures, neighbours and members of the family began to emigrate to America and, finally, Honora’s parents died, which is the reason why the girl ended up in a workhouse. On the ship, Honora becomes a storyteller, like her father. When she reaches her destination in Australia and the surgeon-superintendent asks what she would like to have, she answers: “I’d like a dictionary [...] and a map,’ she added, remembering the shape of her home” (109).

Among Honora’s coping strategies to deal with the uncertainty of her future and her fear of the unknown are her resignation and determination to survive. On hearing incomprehensible accents on the harbour of Plymouth, Honora’s resolve is rendered by the narrator through free indirect discourse: “But nothing was familiar. But it didn’t matter. Everything did not have to be familiar, she had learned that since leaving Dublin, thirty-six hours ago, or was it longer?” (36). Little by little, Honora learns to take foreignness in her stride, although she does so at a high personal cost. The comparisons between *here*, on the ship, and *there*, back in Ireland, help in the transition, so when Charles Strutt, the superintendent in charge of the girls, talks about starting a school on the ship, Anne Sherry remembers the Irish hedge schools: “Well, my mother went to a hedge school, maybe it will be like that” (54). Hedge schools were allegedly clandestine because of the British Penal Laws of 1695, which banned the schooling of Catholics in Ireland. The most poignant bond between the ship at sea and Ireland is that conceived by Honora about sharing with her remaining siblings in Ireland the same sky no matter where she went:

She wanted to believe this was the same sky that was over the home she had just glimpsed on the map, the one she had been taken from and would never see again. That became clear the more days passed. Who could ever come back from so far? If she could believe it was the same sky surely that would help. (58) The shock will come, however, when she is later told that the constellations seen in Australia and in Ireland are not the same because of the change of hemisphere. This distressing realization is deftly summarized in the title of the novel, *Not the Same Sky*.

Similarities between the new surroundings and Ireland sometimes come up in unexpected situations and help to forge new attachments, as when Honora looks at the deserted houses in her destination place and remembers her home back in Ireland, the one the children had to abandon when their parents died: “But Honora could like these houses”, the narrator informs us (114). Likewise, one year after her arrival, Honora finds a man who, she thinks, looks like her father, although “he didn’t smell like her father. He didn’t speak like her father” (148) and will accept him as husband.

Nevertheless, it comes as no surprise that the differences in Australia surpass any attempts by the girls to establish comparisons: landscape, plants, animals, people, food, *etc.* hold the orphan girls in awe: yellow grass, white trees, no hedges, dry rust, shadows falling differently, bats, kangaroos, birds of spectacular plumage, they will all amaze the girls and challenge them to relinquish any analogies. Close to the end of her life, Honora will avow her unflinching marvelling at the splendours of plant and animal life in Australia.

Identity-As-Parameter and Identity-As-Limit

Once on the Thomas Arbuthnot, the girls are instructed to share sleeping slots, to take care of one another when seasick, and they are organized in couples so that the most mature girls take responsibility towards

the younger ones, as in the groups for classes, where the weaker students are guided by the stronger ones. Together, they also make a quilt to be offered to the surgeon-superintendent at the end of the voyage. The quilt is a common trope of feminine collaborative work, and the narrator explains the continuous negotiations and social skills that go into its making:

Girls who had wanted to be dogmatic about the way their mothers had done it had given up. Either they had realised that everyone was entitled to do their square—even if some of them were uneven and perhaps marred the overall look— or else they had decided that their desire for the greatest colours and matches would have to wait until they were doing their own in their new home. (89)

These common activities create a sense of community, dependence and mutual support that will form a new collective identity for the orphan girls: that of “us”. The characters will later raise the issue of whether this collective identity really exists or whether they are just a heterogeneous group of very different individuals. Before dying, Honora writes a letter and leaves instructions to one of her sons to give it to the other orphan girls he may manage to gather for her funeral. In this letter she maintains that the orphan girls did form a community in spite of the fact that, upon arrival in Australia, they were scattered and distributed in different towns, homes, and businesses:

Teresa says that there is no “us”. She says that to see the 4000 of us as “one”, is nonsense. And yet it was she who told me 4000—I had not known that number [...] I was told in Ryan’s that they had a debate in the London Parliament about “us”. It proves that we are one. And our names are all together in an office. (201)

In his book *The Ethics of Identity*, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah makes the distinction between *who* we are, our individuality, and *what* we are, our identity (2005: xiv). Identities are then social forms that experience tensions between the alleged homogeneity of the group and the singular, situated selves (*ibid.*: xv). Appiah is a firm believer in the fact that the individual can and does live with many loyalties, and not just one to a single social form (*ibid.*:214). When Honora vindicates the category “us”, she is struggling against oblivion and denial in an attempt to preserve a community that shared the same trauma and implemented strategies of mutual aid. This could correspond to what Appiah calls “identity as a parameter”, which is the case when “categories designed for subordination can also be used to mobilize and empower people as members of a self-affirmative identity” (*ibid.*: 112). On the contrary, Honora’s friend, Teresa Furey, sees the category “orphan girls” as a constraint, an obstacle to leaving trauma behind and moving on in life. Appiah admits that identity-as-parameter and identity-as-limit actually constitute a two-way traffic and may easily coexist (*ibid.*: 112).

On considering the experience of the famines in Ireland, the British settlers in Australia also question the possibility of a collective memory of the Irish famine: “that would presume everyone experienced it in the same way, which is certainly not true” (179). That there should be heterogeneity within the affected groups is understandable but British settlers have a vested interest in division in order to elude responsibility for the British government’s handling of the catastrophe. Settlers themselves encourage divisive practices also in banal situations, as happens with the chalk line drawn on the dancing floor so that masters and servants do not mix up (163). Contrary to these divisive ruses, some cultural artifacts, like Thomas Moore’s nostalgic melodies about Ireland’s glorious past, enthusiastically bring the Irish together (184).

The Linguistic Conflict

The linguistic conflict deriving from the British colonization of Ireland also plays a role in the novel, although it is not at the forefront of the plot. One of the criteria for the selection of the orphan girls is that they should speak English, which they are expected to have learnt at school. About the most defiant girl in the group, Julia Cuffe, the narrator says: “She was good at English, could already swear in it” (25), which necessarily recalls Caliban’s retort to Miranda in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, a play that also delves into the practices and effects of colonialism: “You taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is that I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!” (I, ii, 365–367). On another occasion, Julia Cuffe also talks back to an official who has a difficulty with the spelling of Irish names: “I can spell in my own tongue” (39).

Although the language conflict is not prominent in this novel written in English, the vernacular language, Irish Gaelic or *Gaeilge* —another term for the Irish language— is at times bound to the girls' Irish identity and to their past lives before the voyage, thereby signifying their conflictive dual identity. In fact, Honora's letter, which is to be read posthumously, begins with two quotations, the second of which is from a well-known poem by the Irish-language poet Anthony Raftery: "Mise Raifteirí an file, Lán dóchas is grá..." [I am Raftery the poet, full of hope and love] (200). It is not only the coincidence in the last names of the poet and the protagonist that calls the reader's attention but the dominant mood of their texts, both written at the end of a life's long journey. In her letter, Honora wants to come to terms with her suppressed past and, the Irish quotation suggests, with her suppressed vernacular language as well.

The English language will accentuate the orphan girls' sense of foreignness, as they associate the language learnt at school, with that learnt on the ship and used in Australia (141), thereby connecting the colonizing language with the traumatic experiences lived. However, even if the Irish language learnt and spoken at home, with family and neighbours, has positive emotional attachments in the novel, the English language is that which facilitates emigration, escaping from the famines and, hence, survival, which evinces the paradoxical workings of colonialism.

The loss of Irish, not just among the migrants but also in their homeland because of its speakers' death or emigration, also takes its emotional toll, as we see in the case of Bridget Joyce, who attributes her miserable state in part to the English language: "And I'm tired of speaking English all the time, there's no rest from it" (124). Losing their Irish is also associated in the novel with the girls' loss, or even cancellation, of their past and the concomitant trouble for their self-identity: "They might, too, have lost the language to tell the story" (244).

Xenophobia and Racism

Charles Strutt, the English surgeon-superintendent in charge of the girls, soon becomes more concerned for their health and well-being than anybody else in the transportation scheme to the extent that he starts to think of them as "his" girls (47). Revealingly enough, his concern for them surges on reading about the xenophobic reactions they awake in Australia: "[one newspaper editor] poured scorn on everything about these newly landed girls: their place of origin, their beliefs, their tongue, even their looks" (46). This vitriolic reaction illustrates the amalgam of different marks of identity —nationality, religion, language and physical appearance— exhibited by xenophobic discourse. Mary Daly similarly highlights the way many accounts of Irish female emigration are "replete with gender, religious and racial discourse" (2014: 19). To the journalist's alienating "them", Charles Strutt responds by committing himself to the improvement of "his" girls with naïve enthusiasm: "He would also feed them and build them up. They would be grateful for their training, it would make their lives better when they got there [...] At this point in his effusive plans, the girls became his. Not *the*, nor *those*, but *his*" (emphasis in the original, 46–47).

Xenos-phobia, or fear of the stranger, can be mixed up with racism — discrimination on the basis of physical, biological features— even among white people, as was the case in Australia. The British Empire, on claiming whiteness for the English only, concomitantly identified a set of "inferior" races, particularly in reference to the Irish, who had been animalized and racialized since the Renaissance and, in the second half of the nineteenth century, were included in an "index of Nigrescence" and identified as sharing Africanoid features (Ashcroft & Griffiths & Tiffin 2007: 184). Therefore, when the girls' looks are mentioned by Australian journalists, it may be, not just because of their malnutrition or poor clothes, but also because of racialized, exclusionary prejudices. The term "Black Irish" has been used throughout centuries to refer to either immigrant or emigrant groups but was particularly common to characterize those who left Ireland because of the mid-nineteenth-century famines (Irish Central Staff 2022). Contrary to this, and paradoxical though it may seem, Breda Gray informs that in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, Irish women were sought to "breed an indigenous white population" (Gray 2004: 176). Racism, therefore, did operate in both antithetical ways: on the one hand, to exclude Irish immigrants by "darkening" them and, on the other, to appropriate them so as to "whiten" the colony's population stock.

Settlers and Aboriginal Peoples

Concerned as it is with the orphan girls' voyage and lives in Australia, the novel *Not the Same Sky* pays little attention to the Australian Aboriginal peoples but, although marginal in the narrative, they are occasionally acknowledged as legitimate, although dispossessed, owners of the land and as the most knowledgeable regarding the land and natural risks. The narrator tells, for instance, of a man of the Wiradjuri people who rescued dozens of settlers during the Big Flood of 1852. However, the indigenous population and their land property rights are not respected by the greedy new settlers who have arrived to plunder the land and its riches:

"Ah, Charles, we're discussing native populations, what to do about them. You know, in theory, we do not believe that Aboriginal land can be legally possessed if it is occupied, but practice is another thing. [...] It is not always possible to get a definitive agreement on what constitutes *terra nullius*". (176-177)

The new settlers maintain that they are entitled to own territory that is inhabited and used by Aboriginal peoples, whose customary property rights are not recognized. Honora Raftery, however, although she is an underprivileged settler, realizes that the little house she has occupied upon marriage is on somebody else's land. She is aware that she was once dispossessed of her own family home in Ireland and was, after that, displaced. Now, no matter how unwillingly, she is participating in the colonial project that dispossesses and displaces others:

There's a man around here who watches me. He saw me before I saw him. He was here first. I know what he thinks of me. I want to say to him that I do not want to be in a house on his land, I have my own spot, even if I cannot get to it. [...] When he saw us coming he stared, then after staring long enough he thought that maybe he could share with us, but then he realised that we didn't want to share, we wanted to own. (202)

Honora's use of "us" here does not simply refer to her newly formed family unit, but to settlers in general, of whom she has become another member. It is the encounter with the Aboriginal person that relocates her in a different group from that of the Irish orphan girls as "us". Both senses of identity, the immigrant underdog and the striving settler coexist, and they manifest themselves in the letter she has written through the use of the same pronoun "us". As Julia Kristeva has remarked, "just because one is a foreigner does not mean one is without one's foreigner" (1991: 24). Thus, the Aboriginal peoples are the foreigners of the foreigners, *i.e.* they are doubly estranged.

Trauma

In her analysis of a selection of twenty-first-century Irish novels confronting traumatic subjects, Kathleen Costello-Sullivan makes a distinction between twentieth-century literary responses to traumatic events in Irish history and those produced after the Celtic Tiger era:

Previous trauma narratives [...] centre predominantly on the role of silence and the individual, communal or societal suffering that traumas induce. In contrast, twenty-first-century Irish narratives increasingly turn from just recognizing traumatic experiences toward also exploring and representing the process of healing and recovery, interrogating this possibility from the vantage of the author's time and place. This shift is often manifest structurally —for example, through a metanarrative engagement with traumatic representation. (2018: 3)

Conlon's novel, published in 2013, can be included in the category of post-Celtic-Tiger fiction and be interpreted as a sobering reaction to the nation's greed and smugness. Furthermore, it can be argued that the novel shares features of both earlier and recent trauma narratives in Ireland, as will be seen in the analysis to follow. *Not the Same Sky* is an unflinching endeavour to disseminate knowledge about the transportation of the orphan girls to Australia during the Great Irish Famine crisis. Likewise it fictionally recreates the atrocious suffering that the girls must have experienced. Moreover, as pointed out by Margaret Kelleher (2023: 118-123), Conlon's novel also features a number of metanarrative strategies that foster a reflection on the representation of trauma, whether in literature or in the plastic arts. What remains to be decided, however, is whether this novel provides a more redemptive or hopeful response to trauma than novels from the previous century and whether this should be its objective at all. The last few chapters of the novel focus on the twenty-first-century point of view, as readers get to know the

stonemason's reactions to the information she gradually learns about the girls' predicament. This present-day "recuperation" of a past trauma and the stonemason's coping strategy as she relates the girls' ordeal to bird migration may be understood as an attempt at redemption so as to move on in life and history, but, as will be argued in the next section on "Migration and the Animal Trope" the comparison of the transportation of the girls in a colonial context to bird migrations remains problematic.

There is little doubt that the experience of the famine and of the transportation to Australia was a traumatic one. Each character in the novel copes with this trauma to the best of their ability but all of them are haunted by that same past they try to suppress. Charles Strutt, the surgeon-superintendent, is, years later, advised to meet some of the girls: "It might put your mind at rest" (186). Even if he was sympathetic and caring in his behaviour towards the girls, he was a required partner in the transportation scheme and went ahead with it. As a consequence, he repeatedly feels pangs of guilt: "Charles wondered if he had been in need of some pardon or at least the sound of it" (187-188).

When Charles Strutt visits the girls years after, he is not wholeheartedly welcome because of the painful memories he brings up. The girls who are now wives and mothers warn him they will not speak of the past: "'But we don't go into the past,' she said, reading his mind the way Anne Sherry had done, 'I build new memories here,' she said, 'for my children [...] they wouldn't like mine [...] And anyway, no one would believe us'" (191, 193). This cancellation of the past and refusal to remember are, paradoxical though it may seem, an integral part of the workings of memory. Josefina Cuesta reminds us of the impossibility of a complete or comprehensive memory that incorporates all the facts and events. Memory is necessarily selective and limited. Furthermore, Cuesta insists that memory is evoked by present desires and that the assemblage of memories depends on one's present cultural models (2014: 32). Given the orphan girls' later lives as wives, mothers and working women, the memory of famine and transportation seems to them incompatible with their desire to build new memories for their children. The settlers' cultural model and the projects they are designing for their offspring—one of Honora's descendants will become a Member of State Parliament (246)—do not seem to call for the memories of their traumatic past. This elision of the past is made manifest in the priest's speech about Honora's life in her funeral: "It appeared to begin at her marriage, flourish with her children, the six of them all here today, and glowed nicely with her grandchildren, twenty of them, also all here today" (199). This cancellation of the past renders the attending women who had been part of the orphan girls' group, as spectres: "The two strange women and the four locals walked behind the coffin like ghosts from another place" (199). Honora had managed to bring her brother to Australia, but he did not want to remember the past either: "He said that remembering brought only desolation. We had seen the abyss of hunger, the apocalypse of it. We had fallen into the open mouth of the famine. Why would we want to remember?" (205).

However, "the savagery of what had happened to them" (70) will not let itself be forgotten that easily and Honora's last letter to an anonymous addressee bears the tensions between memory and amnesia in its heading: "What I Remember. Why Not To Remember. Ways of Forgetting" (200). In her text, Honora is reproachful towards those who, even if meaning well, would not allow her to talk about the past. Although she acknowledges the need to forget the pain she felt on her parents' deaths and her fear during the voyage, Honora is concerned about the gap in the transmission of memory: "My daughters and Teresa's daughters sat together in class and knew nothing about their mothers. They might not have believed me. And I wanted my children to believe me" (204). Honora would like to pass memory on to her daughters, but not the trauma. She is continuously torn between the need for a new beginning and the fear to betray her Irish family by forgetting them: "On that morning I loved the look of the land too, and I wondered if I had betrayed them all" (205).

In fact, the novel is itself an act of memory and a commemoration, very much like Honora's letter, the Memorial Committee's project, Joy Kennedy's work as a stonemason of grave headstones, the Church registers, the Records Office and all the other institutions, individuals and activities mentioned in the novel, which are involved in what President Mary Robinson called the "moral" act of commemoration, as seen in the earlier quotation of her speech in this chapter. As the novel concludes, memory requires protection and attention, also in the case of the more sinister events of history: "someone has to tend to memory, and keep both the dark and the light parts nurtured in some way, so that they're there when needed" (224).

Migration and the Animal Trope

There may be a risk in naturalizing human migrant activity and presenting it as a natural phenomenon comparable to that of animals because one cannot ignore the political and economic interests behind the push and pull of migrants around the world. *Not the Same Sky*, although abounding in tropes of migrating birds, does not overlook the spurious interests behind the transportation of the orphan girls. The girls' resistance to this scheme is evident and their sense of uprootedness is repeatedly expressed, as when Julia Cuffe says to the surgeon- superintendent: "You're the one who brought me here [...] I'm not from Australia" (118). In her few diary pages, Julia inextricably connects being from Ireland with being in Ireland (217). Traditional practices such as the wakes for emigrants on the eve of their departure (Hackney and Hackney Blackwell 2007: 153), and the references in the novel to the custom of walking the migrants to their point of departure (31), the conviction about the impossibility to return (55, 58, 65, 85), the girls' wailing on rounding the Cape of Good Hope (85–86), all of these are attitudes and behaviours that nearly equate emigration to death. As Corinne Alexandre-Garner has remarked, the migrant's deracination makes the experience of exile resemble that of death (2012: 16). Likewise, current debates about necropolitics identify the Great Irish Famine as a fitting example of necropower, *i.e.* the political regulation of death and life, because of the way it facilitated the elimination of what was considered to be a surplus of poor people (Petković 2017: 325).

Nevertheless, the novel weaves a net of tropes, especially bird imagery, that connect not only the main characters but also humankind in general to the animal world, as if to highlight our common animality and the soothing effects on the mind of human contact with animals. Honora Raftery realizes that a new beginning is conceivable in Australia when she feels the desire to learn the names of the unknown birds (145). Bridget Joyce, the character with the most fragile mental health, has a definitive breakdown when she is removed to a house where she cannot see and speak to birds (128). Anne Sherry finds mental peace and professional success in making hats with bird feathers that she collects from the ground (155). The bird trope is therefore relevant to the girls' identity in that they yearn for this reconnection with nature. The divide between *us*, the human animal, and *them*, the nonhuman animal, is bridged. The novel also concludes with a manifest parallelism of animal and human migration that recalls Kwame Anthony Appiah's conviction that "the nomadic urge is deep within us [...] We have always been a traveling species" (2005: 215). On her return from Australia, the sculptor Joy Kennedy begins to make a map of bird migration: "*They go to where the food is, a lot like us. Some of them have altruistic tendencies and some don't —also like us*" (emphasis added, 251).

Concluding Remarks

Evelyn Conlon's *Not the Same Sky* is a novel of the twenty-first century concerned with a tragedy of the nineteenth century: the Irish famines and the subsequent transportation of 4,414 orphan girls to Australia with the aim of providing cheap labour to the settlers and thereby reducing the number of dependants in crammed workhouses. The relevance of this topic to the debate around identity, sameness and difference, has to do with the impact of the Irish diaspora on the notion of Irishness, and with the encounter with difference favoured by the context of migration. However, the first *us-them* contrast takes place in Ireland because of the colonial situation of the country, which was made part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland through the Act of Union of 1801. Besides the dispossession and displacement of Irish families, the iniquitous handling of the famines, the eviction of tenants by landlords and the mass emigration provoked by these circumstances, the novel is also engaged with the linguistic conflict between the Irish vernacular and the imposition of the English language, which results in the suppression of the vernacular, of the culture that developed in this language and which, concomitantly, contributes to the formation of conflictive dual identities.

The female gender of the protagonists and their young age are also decisive factors for the plot of the novel and for the historical information that the novel provides to migration studies with a feminist outlook. Apart from the personal debacles, the novel delves into the conditions in which especially vulnerable young women are forced to emigrate and the social and economic roles they play in the destination country. In their determination to survive, the young protagonists develop a number of strategies to cope with their tragedy and to gradually come to terms with the strangeness of their new situation. Among such strategies is the formation of a collective identity, an *us*, which actually has a contradictory outcome: it serves as a network of mutual support but also ties the orphan girls to their tragic past, hence their conflictive attitude towards the memory of past traumatic events. For the victims of famines and transportation, memory is too painful and paralyzing but forgetting also has detrimental

consequences, as the past is cancelled and the transmission of memory from one generation to the next is interrupted. For Evelyn Conlon, the Memorial Committee in the novel, and present-day readers, remembrance is a moral act.

Migration may be an inherent characteristic of our species, as well as of other nonhuman animals, but forced emigration responds to economic and geostrategic interests that need to be examined. *Not the Same Sky* combines both approaches to the phenomenon of migration: the natural —mainly towards the end of the novel by means of the trope of bird migration— and the political, throughout the text but especially at the beginning, on presenting the colonialist solution to the famines and the overcrowded workhouses. Additionally, the confrontations with the stranger in the form of xenophobia and racism are also rendered in the novel, both those suffered by the Irish orphans and by other groups such as the Aboriginal peoples, especially once Western immigrants become settlers.