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Brave enough to fight? Masculinity, migration and the Irish revolution

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the nationalist side in revolutionary Ireland (1912–23), examining concepts of bravery, heroic masculinity, fighting for principles and country, all of which have important impacts on understandings of masculinities during the time period (and indeed before and beyond it). Contemporary nationalist rhetoric emphasised the need to rally all men for an armed struggle: such language paid no heed to the economic realities of many families in Ireland that still needed adult children to migrate. Historians of this period have done much to uncover the contributions of various groups, but they have rarely examined the gendered ideologies surrounding men in this period, nor have they taken on board the insights from international histories of violence, war and revolution that have interrogated militaristic forms of masculinity in other countries.


KEYWORDS

Irish revolution;
masculinities; migration; Irish
history; bravery; gender

'Tis no mad dream: I heerd the tread of countless marching men.
Old Ireland is ablaze, ablaze in city, field and glen.
"To arms!" the cry goes down the wind, and with a wild delight
We rush to arms, and pray "God, speed another gallant fight".¹

Introduction

Republican martyr Terence MacSwiney was lauded by the Knights of the Red Branch in San Francisco as typifying the "soul of the Irish nation – immutable, unchainable, invincible".² The poem "Battle Cry" appeared in an elegiac and romantic volume published by the Knights to raise funds for his family after his tragic death. Elsewhere, he expressed these sentiments less poetically: "Emigration is Desertion. Make this a battle cry to hearten the waverer and scourge the coward who is ready to run away. Cowards should be scourged!".³ He was not alone in making a simplistic connection between emigration and a perceived lack of courage. The revolutionary period in Ireland (defined broadly as 1912–23), saw many examples of prominent revolutionaries expressing their desires to fight for Ireland's freedom in language that was inspirational, yet far removed from the more prosaic concerns of the populace. How to sustain oneself and one's family while fighting for Irish freedom was never addressed in such rhetoric. The alternative to

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destitution at home was migration, an escape route used by millions of Irish men and women in the decades before the Rising. Despite rallying speeches, propaganda, and premature predictions that Ireland's blight of emigration had ended, it had not. In this article, propaganda, pamphlets, speeches, literary works, newspaper coverage and census material from the period will be used to explore the question of masculinity and who was deemed "brave" in Ireland during the revolutionary era.⁴

The Irish revolution has long attracted scholarly attention (any attempt at citing all studies would be fruitless) and the recent centenary of the 1916 Rising provoked further studies, including new critical analyses of the contributions of women.⁵ While these are welcome interventions, the literature has yet to be significantly impacted by international trends in historical analyses of men *as men* apropos of Kimmel's calls to make masculinity visible.⁶ Sinha could claim in 1999 that contemporary American, European and Australian historiography included "a fairly respectable body of literature on men and masculinity" but that did not include Ireland, despite advances in transnational approaches and the significant body of work in the field of women's history.⁷ The privileged invisibility of men's gender has prevailed, until recently, in Irish historiography. As Haraway defined it: "Gender is always a relationship, not a preformed category of beings or a possession that one can have. Gender does not pertain more to women than to men".⁸ Here, gendered understandings and assumptions about male migrant identity are critically evaluated in the context of the Irish revolution. Griffin has argued that "Power relations between masculinities have been a fundamental element of the gender order".⁹ In this period, power relations between male migrants and male insurgents could not be clearer – in the hierarchy of contemporary masculinities the male national revolutionary represented the pinnacle of male identity to many.

In previous work, the dynamics of women's migration have been explored: how they were viewed, what they experienced and how this has been qualitatively different from the male Irish migrant experience.¹⁰ While sexuality and sexual behaviour is one of those marked gendered differences in how men and women were judged, research into the revolutionary period suggests interesting parallels with male migrants. The body is central to an understanding of contemporary gender norms, or, simply put, using language of the time, what it was to be "manly" in this era is intimately connected to masculinist notions of the body.¹¹

Dudink has questioned the recent fascination with the concept of masculinity as a "new" scholarly inquiry. He asks "why is masculinity so intriguing to historians interested in gender? One explanation for the prominence of the concept 'masculinity' in current historical work on gender is its aim to name and mark a category that has managed to go unmarked for the longest time".¹² Dudink points to the oddity of this compared to the approach taken in women's history in which femininity, or femininities, are not the main focus. While I agree with the spirit of Dudink's argument, it seems that when it comes to Irish history we need to start with the basics. Even in the plethora of "new" studies that emerged in commemorating 1916, gender or masculinities were not at the forefront of the analyses of histories that were ostensibly about men. The approach taken in this article is firmly in support of McGaughey's lead in the field, where she has argued that using "manliness as a lens for reading Irish history shows us concepts and themes that are eclipsed in primarily political analyses. These include communal beliefs about the roles of heroism, defence, fraternalism, and punishment" and while McGaughey's remarks relate

to her study of Ulster, they have a perceptive reach across the island of Ireland.¹³ Indeed, in reviewing McGaughey's *Ulster's Men*, the late Keith Jeffery said:

It is to be hoped that this study will stimulate further work on masculinity in modern Irish history, especially among nationalists who, if anything, seem to have been even more devoted to traditional concepts of manliness and appropriate gender roles than their Unionist fellow countrymen (and women).¹⁴

Both McGaughey and Beatty have led the way in applying Scott's concept of gender as a category of historical analysis to a new history of men in Ireland as citizens also possessing a gender.¹⁵ Horne has also reflected on the fact that politics and war "are specially suited to exploring the historical nature of masculinity" because they have long been the preserve of men and have inspired written accounts since the eighteenth century.¹⁶ This article seeks to extend this work to reflect on how discourses of militaristic masculinity in the revolutionary era were used to denigrate Irish migrants. Before examining migration rhetoric, particularly the migration of men during the revolutionary era, rates of migration will first be examined.

Migration rates during the revolution

Patterns of migration from Ireland have long intrigued scholars from various disciplines and often elude the desired specificity scholars would like due to diverse requirements for migrants at different periods that may or may not have left documentary evidence. The Census has been widely used to construct estimates of migration from Ireland, but with no Census in 1921 due to the War of Independence, the migration trends of the revolutionary period are even more difficult to trace. As Delaney has observed, "demographic patterns unlike political events are not discernible or easily categorised within short time spans".¹⁷ Between 1911 and 1921, it is estimated that 81,187 men and 83,204 women (a total of 164,391 people) migrated from Ireland.¹⁸ These rates show an almost perfect gender balance between migrants, yet women were not (in this period) castigated for migrating in the same way as men, a factor that highlights gendered attitudes to migration from revolutionary Ireland as will be discussed below. The rates were also half what they had been in the previous decade, demonstrating the effect the First World War had on limiting migration which by that time had "long since become a structural element of the post-famine social order".¹⁹ Indeed, Fitzpatrick speculated that while fear of conscription to the British army provoked the emigration of 4,500 young men between 1914 and 1915, the prevention of migration during the war may have increased the size of republican forces.²⁰ In counties that traditionally lost high numbers of citizens to migration, such as Mayo, Kerry, Leitrim, Donegal, and Clare, "Sinn Féin won its strongest popular following in 1917–18" and Fitzpatrick speculated that it "seems plausible, if unprovable, that thwarted emigrants contributed both personnel and passion" to the nationalist cause.²¹ "Thwarted" migrants were to prove crucial, along with returned soldiers, to the guerrilla tactics used during the War of Independence.²² The correlation between increasing numbers of radical nationalists in Ireland and the restriction of emigration may suggest dissatisfaction with political conditions, but also perhaps another idea: that those who left were the ones motivated to do so by a rejection of the *status quo*, the more adventurous or rebellious.

Utilising British parliamentary reports on migration, the Central Statistics Office has provided more detailed estimates of Irish migration between 1916 and 1920 that illuminate the demographic profile of migrants as seen in Table 1. It is noticeable that for the period 1916–20 emigration from Ireland was primarily undertaken by young Irish women in the 15–24-year age group, with the next highest being women in the 25–44-year age group. In both cases, women outnumbered men exponentially: there were over 8.5 times more women than men in the younger age category, and over twice as many women than men in the older category in 1916. Overall, between 1916 and 1920, there were about one-third more female migrants than male, and the majority were between 15 and 44 years of age, a cohort who were young enough to potentially contribute to revolutionary activity (if amenable). The high numbers of young, virile people leaving provoked anxieties that took on a heightened tenor as the twentieth century wore on and the Irish population continued to fall. Many expressed sentiments similar to Rev. Joseph Meehan in 1908: “The wastrels stop at home. The unfitted survive, and the race declines”.²³ Alarmist notions of race suicide and the quality of the “stock” of people left at home fed into nationalist discourses that emphasised physical fitness and were sustained in popular discourses for at least the next fifty years.²⁴

Table 1. Estimated migration from Ireland by age and sex, 1916–1920.

Age group	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
0–14	1,013	835	457	859	1,330
15–24	4,242	422	108	809	9,646
25–44	1,699	746	357	1,174	4,074
45–59	353	108	56	207	419
60 and over	59	18	5	65	116
Total persons	7,366	2,129	983	3,114	15,585
Of which:					
Irish nationals	7,302	2,111	980	2,975	15,531
Non-Irish nationals	64	18	3	466	54
Males					
0–14	538	465	240	451	673
15–24	442	97	40	244	3,182
25–44	519	214	123	401	2,027
45–59	255	65	38	93	153
60 and over	32	11	2	39	40
Total males	1,786	852	443	1,228	6,075
Of which:					
Irish nationals	1,743	838	442	1,137	6,044
Non-Irish nationals	43	14	1	91	31
Females					
0–14	475	370	217	408	657
15–24	3,800	325	68	565	6,464
25–44	1,180	532	234	773	2,047
45–59	98	43	18	114	266
60 and over	27	7	3	26	76
Total females	5,580	1,277	540	1,886	9,510
Of which:					
Irish nationals	5,559	1,273	538	1,838	9,487
Non-Irish nationals	21	4	2	48	23

Source: Adapted from Central Statistics Office “Life in 1916 Ireland: Stories from statistics Emigration” Table 1.8 Estimated Emigration by sex, age group and nationality, 1916–1920 and 2011–2015, using Emigration Statistics of Ireland in House of Commons Parliamentary Report, Population and Migration estimates and CSO data. Available from <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-1916/1916irl/people/emigration/> [Accessed 9 January 2021].

For both men and women, the data shows migrants were overwhelmingly Irish born, so it seems likely that they were first-time migrants, following in the footsteps of earlier waves of citizens driven by poor economic conditions in Ireland. As Table 2 demonstrates they were part of a large cohort of people headed primary to the USA and Canada. Although we can observe continuous migration to Britain from Ireland, North America remained the favoured destination up to the 1920s when greater immigration control and the economic downturn at the end of the decade led migrants more predominantly to Britain. The lowest number of emigrants from Ireland during the revolutionary era was in 1918 at just 980 persons leaving for all destinations. The exigencies and dangers of the war are undoubtedly responsible for this lull, but there were signs that emigration was resuming shortly after this and that radical measures had to be taken by Sinn Féin to stop it so republican forces were not diminished. The desperate need for manpower and the presumed duty of every Irishman to fight for Irish independence was articulated at the very beginning of the revolutionary period as Irish Volunteer literature and the writings of prominent nationalists reveals. As has been well documented, the Volunteers, established in 1913, were infiltrated with IRB men eager to capitalise on a spirit of growing unrest with the use of armed violence to achieve independence.

Rhetoric on the manly fighter before the Rising

Aidan Beatty has traced the conflation of “national sovereignty and masculine strength” to the 1880s and examined its potency until the 1930s, but rightly identifies the Irish revolutionary period as when these ideas were particularly acute.²⁵ The desire to disprove inferior representations of Irishmen led Irish nationalists to craft an “image of strong and racially redeemed Irish men”.²⁶ This can clearly be seen in the literature of the era which glorified Irish Catholic, republican manliness as brave, daring and resilient and emphasised the physical qualities necessary to fight for independence.²⁷ These ideals of masculinity were also framed within the context of modernity. As Beatty has highlighted in Mosse’s work, the “modern” man was “disciplined, orderly, restrained”.²⁸ This was a rejection of the racial indeterminacy identified by Banarjee which situated the Irish as neither white nor black in imperial discourses.²⁹ In the hierarchy of masculinities emanating from the nineteenth century, the citizen soldier ranked as the pre-eminent force in

Table 2. Estimated emigration from Ireland by destination, 1912–1920.

Years	UK	USA	Canada	Australia	Rest of world ³	Total persons	Estimated Population	Ratio of Emigrants (per 1,000 population)
1912	1,867	20,466	5,788	842	381	29,344	4,384,710	6.7
1913	1,149	21,758	6,673	915	472	30,967	4,379,012	7.1
1914	1,047	15,272	2,909	768	318	20,314	4,381,308	4.6
1915	2,898	6,681	597	347	136	10,659	4,337,000	2.5
1916	2,446	4,207	485	100	64	7,302	4,337,000	1.7
1917	1,908	88	79	13	23	2,111	4,390,219	0.5
1918	879	12	54	32	3	980	4,390,219	0.2
1919	1,073	848	947	60	47	2,975	4,390,219	0.7
1920	582	12,288	2,109	212	340	15,531	4,390,219	3.5

Source: Adapted from Central Statistics Office “Life in 1916 Ireland: Stories from statistics Emigration” Table 1.9 Estimated emigration classified by destination, 1912–1920 and 2011–2015, using Emigration Statistics of Ireland in House of Commons Parliamentary Reports, Population and Migration estimates CSO. Available from <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-1916/1916irl/people/emigration/> [Accessed 9 January 2021].

society: skilled in military training, the “premier” citizen was not necessarily the wealthy man but the one who could wield a weapon. As Horne defined it in a European context “an idealised version of the soldier provided one form of masculine claim on the nation, and vice versa. The volunteer ready to die in defence of the fatherland was the most obvious expression of this idea”.³⁰

The Irish nationalist citizen would be of this ilk: brave, determined, physically daring. This found a corollary in Unionist circles as the era “provided a hierarchy of identities informed by and informing individual and collective manifestations of unionist manliness and Protestant homosocial relations” as McGaughey has identified.³¹ Thus, the glorifying of and glorying in blood sacrifice, militarism and violence as legitimate means to articulate political desires were ideas understood across the political divide over the Act of Union or the “Irish Question”, as elsewhere in the era before and during the First World War.

Understandings of manhood had become increasingly shaped in the long nineteenth century by ideas of outdoor virility. This partially explains why drilling was so ostentatiously and so regularly performed by both the Irish Volunteers and the Ulster Volunteer Force in the period before the Rising. There was a certain romanticism to this performativity of heroic masculinity to paraphrase Judith Butler³² and a connection in the rhetoric of Piaras Beaslai, the quintessential migrant nationalist, with the rule of Britain and the emasculation of Irish men:

In material matters the policy of England has been to turn Ireland into a storehouse for the feeding of England; on the mental side her policy has been to crush kill and check all manhood, self-respect and self-reliance among Irishmen, to promote the breeding of a race of corrupt crawling [he crossed out servile] and imitative dependents, or stupid creatures whose muscles and sinews may be employed in keeping their fellow-countrymen in subjection or in fighting England’s battles.³³

The depiction of nationalist men as having a duty to their nation by increasing their physical strength and risking their bodily safety emerges strongly when one examines the publications associated with the Irish Volunteers. In Eoin MacNeill’s provocative piece, “The North Began”, he argued that nationalists in Ireland should imitate the example of the Ulster Volunteers by forming their own force, not to antagonise the Ulster Unionists but to put pressure on the British government to exert greater control over them.³⁴ Mirroring the homosociality of all-male Unionist activities that blended political and religious beliefs that led to “propagating dominant forms of masculinity”, nationalists were spurred on to create their own physical force answer to the Irish independence question.³⁵

So it was that on 25 November 1913 the Irish Volunteers were founded at a meeting in Dublin which attracted to 7,000 people at the Rotunda Rink. Although the move towards an armed faction was extreme, most of the Volunteers were at this point still Home Rulers and Sinn Féin or other republican groups were little more than at the fringes – many had never been part of any political party. The Irish Volunteers, as a proto-army of the new, imagined nation, would allow men to shake off this colonial effeminacy, and to transform into hard, “real” men; ironically, many also believed joining national armies in 1914 would do the same thing, as did members of the UVF. Forming units, drilling and wearing military-style uniforms allowed for a special male solidarity to develop. Numerous advertisements for Volunteer “outfits” (for that is how they were described) detailed the full

range of accoutrements that could allow one to present as an authentic Volunteer: “splendid” bandoliers, tan haversacks, caps, Boer shape hats, solid leather belts, aluminium water bottles, putties and officers’ caps and haversacks were all available for purchase.³⁶ One such advertisement prefaced the range of goods available to purchase with the slogan: “Keep the foreigner out!” and emphasised the Irish materials used in its products, along with additional harp buckles, a connection to the Irish Ireland movement which linked cultural, economic and political nationalism in this period.³⁷

The *Manifesto* of the Irish Volunteers is riven with language referring to honourable notions of masculinity that, according to its authors, should be expressed in a militaristic fashion:

If ever in history people could say that an opportunity was given them by God’s will to make an honest and manly stand for their rights, that opportunity is given us to-day [...] In the name of National Unity, of National Dignity, of National and Individual Liberty, of Manly Citizenship, we appeal to our countrymen ...³⁸

In these quotes, men’s bodies are tied to national and personal dignity and liberty. Their bodies are the front line between reclaiming independence and continued political subordination. This is a different conception of the body and the Irish nation, so traditionally tied to women as analysed by various scholars.³⁹ This is, however, a traditional formulation of the idea of the nation based on narrow gendered notions of protectors and the protected. Importantly, the vision of this “manly citizenship” was for “defensive and protective” duties that would not include “aggression or domination”.⁴⁰ This implies there are respectable forms of masculine action and others that would bring shame. How to define each is difficult given that the *Manifesto* does not expand upon these terms, but it is clear Volunteers were expected to understand the limits of their own engagement with militaristic expressions of masculine identity. The language invokes a kind of chivalric code in which certain types of violence were lauded while others were prohibited and would bring shame. Recent studies which have uncovered violence against women in the revolutionary era, previously absent from or suppressed in public and academic discourses, suggest deviations from the code were understood if not always abided by.⁴¹

The newspaper produced by the Volunteers, *The Irish Volunteer*, published between February 1914 and April 1916, contains numerous examples of language that emphasised the equation between manliness, physical fitness, and bravery. The first issue claimed that the safety of any state could only be guaranteed by “each citizen making himself morally, intellectually and physically fit”.⁴² It referred to the Volunteers as “virile”, and claimed involvement in the organisation would “make for discipline, self-respect, physical culture, military training and a right feeling of self-reliance”.⁴³ These ideas had currency beyond Irish nationalists as the work of Heffernan attests, but the newspaper is interesting to analyse for the rhetoric it published throughout these years that, I believe, hardened attitudes to emigrants in the post-Rising era.

Going further, in July 1914 *The Irish Volunteer* stated boldly: “We must have rifles [...] All the rest, uniform, equipment, standards, could be dispensed with, but the rifle is the soldier’s arm [...] Every Volunteer should make it clear always and everywhere that now is the time for the rifle”.⁴⁴ The need for arms and the subsequent gun running have been well covered in the extant literature. What is less so is the rhetorical welding of man and machine expressed here as the rifle being a limb. The rifle in this context expresses the

idea of a kind of hybridity between man and weaponry: they not only wield arms, they morph with them so there is no distinction between anatomy and firearm. Such language resonates with Haraway's definition of a cyborg, a "hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction".⁴⁵ This "cyborg" revolutionary nationalist was not a reality at this point, but he was firmly part of an imagined Ireland in which independence could be achieved through a *manly* show of strength and arms. Pearse was to echo this call for ease between man and weaponry: "We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, to the sight of arms, to the use of arms".⁴⁶

By July of 1914, it was proudly proclaimed in the same newspaper that "Ireland today possesses an army of men actuated by a common spirit of patriotism, daily acquiring and applying the habits of disciplined and concerted action and rapidly fitting themselves to bear arms".⁴⁷ Large numbers were indeed turning up in places like Strabane to train four nights a week.⁴⁸ The Volunteers across the country were treated to multiple speeches emphasising the importance of physical fitness as reported in the newspaper. In Athboy, they were told training and drilling led to better health: "vitality, courage, self-confidence, everything that went for manhood spring naturally from trained muscles".⁴⁹ In Dublin, Volunteers were told that the object of physical drilling was *not* display, but "the setting up of the soldier, the development of his muscles".⁵⁰ Specific instructions as to how muscular development should occur is given in the paper in multiple issues; for example, in 1915 it advocated "setting up exercises", such as handgrips, breathing exercises, movements for the wrists and legs, balancing, marching, gymnastics using improvised equipment (including rifles), and athletics, including running, jumping, boxing and wrestling.⁵¹ Comparisons were made between the Boers and the Volunteers, with the claim that the latter was a "finer" force because "we understand discipline better than they and we come from a more soldierly stock". The reader is told: "Nothing is so important now as the training of our soldiers".⁵²

The obsession with manliness and arms is indicated by the frequency with which these ideas were referred to in the newspaper. A search for the term "rifle" garners 1,035 hits in the newspaper for 1914 alone; "manly" appears 344 times between 1914 and 1916; 836 instances of the term "brave" occurred in the same period.⁵³ While not a comprehensive analysis of words that could be analysed to examine concepts of manly bravery and its connection to militaristic material culture and ideology, it does point to further avenues for research as well as establishing a baseline of evidence that these ideas were prevalent during this period.

Patrick Pearse's writings in this vein are well known as he argued repeatedly for the need to rid Ireland of Britain's influence through armed conflict and his work has been well studied.⁵⁴ A particular emphasis on the masculine aspects of his work is instructive, however, and his words in this vein are worth further analysis:

I hold that before we can do any work, any *men's* [sic] work, we must first realise ourselves as men. Whatever comes to Ireland she needs men. And we of this generation are not in any real sense men, for we suffer things that men do not suffer, and we seek to redress grievances by means which men do not employ. We have, for instance, allowed ourselves to be disarmed; and, now that we have the chance of re-arming, we are not seizing it. [...] A thing that stands demonstrable is that nationhood is not achieved otherwise than in arms [...] bloodshed is a cleansing and a sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed; and slavery is one of them.⁵⁵

In Pearse's writing, the liberation of a nation is *men's* work (his emphasis); Ireland's men have lost their sense of manhood through the loss of an independent army; liberation of the country *and* a restoration of manhood will only be achieved through a show of arms. His, and other author's frequent articles in *The Irish Volunteer* suggest a collective agreement about what it meant to be a nationalist. How are these sentiments reflected in attitudes to those who did not wish to stay and fight? Did their migration mean they were not either sufficiently capable or patriotic enough? Were they "weaklings" in the hierarchy of masculinities that drew sharp distinctions between those who had combatant and non-combatant roles, let alone those who refused to fight altogether? The dichotomy between brave and cowardly men crystallised around migration – a "litmus test" for men's access to citizenship of the imagined republic.

"Cowardly" migrants: the gendered migrant rhetoric of the revolution

The act of migration in the era of revolutionary activity highlights particular attitudes to men that connect strongly with theories of nationalism, collective belonging, and duty. Emigration is an issue that also demonstrates one of the key differences between understandings of British versus Irish masculinity in this era. Tosh highlighted the imperialist narrative that drove Britain throughout the nineteenth century, reinforcing certain types of valorised masculinities:

imperial commitment beckoned as an unequivocal avowal of "hard" masculinity, a means of evading the charge of failed manhood. It reinforced a man's sense of his own masculinity, not only in his own estimation, but more importantly in the eyes of others. Ultimately, the colonies provided a sphere in which military aspirations could be safely indulged.⁵⁶

The imperialist discourse of emigration was *not* a rhetoric most Irish emigrants in the post-Famine period could access, or indeed, would have wanted to. In fact, the inverse was true – men leaving to emigrate were cowardly, not conquerors.

Attitudes to emigration in Ireland were complex. On one hand, a strong motif of emigration as exile existed, as explored by Miller: this posited emigration as a banishment from Ireland, with the blame laid squarely at the feet of a callous British administration who had impoverished Ireland and in the eyes of some like John Mitchel, visited a genocide upon it in the form of the Famine.⁵⁷ The notion that the best and brightest were leaving was to continue for another century. On the other hand, there could be resentment towards emigrants who fled the harsh conditions endured by many at home and were, in the (sometimes) false vision of those who stayed, luxuriating in material wealth and comfort, viewed "with envy and hostility by those left behind, as having the opportunity of access to the good things of the world, leaving behind the poverty, tedium and fetters of family".⁵⁸ In the context of the revolution, jealousy over material comforts that may be enjoyed by migrants was less to the fore in public rhetoric than the juxtaposition of men who fought and men who fled.

Women involved in the revolutionary movement were still exceptional. There was no expectation women would "do their bit" in a physical, armed, "brave", way as there was on men, a fact highlighted by the now famous case of Margaret Skinnider, who was told she did not qualify for a pension because soldiers were "generally understood in the masculine sense" under the Army Pensions Act 1923.⁵⁹ However women were not immune to the persuasive

charms of drilling or military style uniforms as members of Cumann na mBan or the Irish Citizen Army. *The Irish Volunteer* notes drilling and stretcher training specifically for Cumann na mBan members and recorded competitions between troops demonstrating their manoeuvres.⁶⁰ However, only men had the social qualities to govern the body politic and only men had the physical qualities to become soldiers. Thus despite their numerical dominance in the migrant flow at this time, women were not subjected to the dramatic, judgemental language deployed against men and, as will be outlined below, there are no accounts of being physically stopped, assaulted or accosted by republican forces in their attempts to migrate.

Migration naturally stalled in the revolutionary period as traditional channels of exiting the country were closed due to the First World War which, as mentioned earlier, boosted support for Sinn Féin in the 1918 election. However, this was not to last. On 24 July 1920 the First Dáil issued a decree claiming that it had “come to our knowledge that a number of men of Military age and other Citizens of the Republic are leaving Ireland” and that as “Ireland cannot spare any of her children at present” emigration would be prohibited:

no citizen of the Irish Republic shall be permitted to leave Ireland for the purpose of settling abroad unless with the written sanction of the Government of the Republic. Applications for Permits must be made to the Secretary of State for Home Affairs. [...] Applications by soldiers of the IRA should set out particulars of their companies, battalions and brigades, and should be authenticated and recommended by the Brigade Commandant in each case.⁶¹

Although “Other Citizens” are noted, the proclamation’s clear emphasis is on men who could be of use in the War of Independence. Citizens were requested to apply for a permit (and hence *permission*), to leave Ireland, stating where they were going and why. This proclamation was subsequently confirmed in a Dáil session on 6 August 1920.⁶² Interestingly, when Liam de Roiste moved as a further amendment “That the Decree be not enforced pending the formulation of a scheme for providing employment in Ireland for intending emigrants”; it was lost by 23 votes to 16 and the original motion condemning emigration was passed. This was to set a familiar pattern for the rest of the century – migrants condemned for leaving but little done to help them stay.

The Dáil had been paying attention to emigration for some time. On 29 June 1920 the Minister for Home Affairs revealed that between January and May there had been a significant increase in migration since the corresponding period of 1919. Between 12 January and 31 May 1920 3,836 people had emigrated, an increase of 2,963 from 1919.⁶³

Some even saw emigration as a cunning, secret ploy by the British to win. Cathal Brugha claimed Britain knew they were losing the War of Independence and so

There is just one chance left for him, that is, to stimulate emigration [...] The young men of Ireland must stand fast. To leave their country at this supreme crisis would be nothing less than base desertion in the face of the enemy. We look upon those Irishmen who have joined the enemy forces as degenerates, and rightly so. But the Irishman who at this stage leaves his country, or withdraws his aid in the vital struggle, is little better. In fact, he is worse in a sense: because the others may never have seen the light, but he has; and he now deliberately turns his back upon it. There can be no possible excuse for desertion at the present time. The plea of want of work will not do. Employment is no scarcer now than it was during the years that the enemy kept the ports closed and compelled Irishmen to stay at home. There will be plenty of employment for everyone in Ireland in future.⁶⁴

Ordinary migrants were caught in the cross hairs of political discourses that took no account of poverty. As Foster has outlined, much of the revolutionary generation were “students, actors, writers, teachers, civil servants; often from comfortable middle-class backgrounds”.⁶⁵ How were people supposed to wait until the Ireland of the future was able to provide adequate employment? The hard-line attitude to emigrants is exemplified most acutely by stealing passports to prevent migration – a classic Irish Republican Army activity according to RIC reports from the time. Many intending emigrants were IRA members, and while it’s unclear why they did not want to stay, it’s possible some were worn down by years of instability and the pressing financial needs of ordinary families in this extraordinary time. Some were openly branded as traitors, accused of cowardice for leaving Ireland at its time of need. We can trace these through newspaper accounts which saw intending migrants come into conflict with the IRA and archival traces from prominent cases where passports were intercepted.

In March 1921 six men who were staying in the Globe Hotel in Dublin had their passports and tickets stolen by men claiming to be from the IRA.⁶⁶ Peter Barrett, Michael Walsh, Patrick Callaghan, Michael Gavin, John Ward and Patrick Callaghan, all from Westport in Mayo were staying in the hotel in advance of their migration to America when between 7 and 8pm three men entered asking if there were any intending emigrants. Although no evidence was reported of the inquirers possessing firearms, the six men identified themselves and went with the gang “offering no resistance”, suggesting this was perceived as a direct and irrefutable demand. Three of the men returned to the hotel to have breakfast and stated they were no longer migrating. Of the remainder, two (Barrett and Ward) appear to have pursued replacement passports immediately; it is unclear about the remaining man. The matter was not reported to the police until the men had left the hotel. What lay behind this dramatic event? Interestingly, this episode appears in the files of the Bureau of Military History. In the testimony of Joseph O’Carroll from Drumcondra, the scene is recounted, although he went to another hotel to accost other members of the emigrant party. According to O’Carroll, G.H.Q. Intelligence had information that several men from the West of Ireland who had served in IRA Units were intending to leave the country for which they were to be court martialled. In O’Carroll’s case, authorities were alerted to suspicious activity around Seville Place where the men he had “arrested” were being detained and he was captured along with the would-be emigrants.⁶⁷ There is limited evidence about the fate of the six young men in the Globe Hotel, but it is noted that only one went independently to the authorities.

The IRA chastisement of men was not isolated to the case of the Globe Hotel. In Queenstown, (Cobh) on 16 March 1921, six men from the Cork and Limerick areas were similarly accosted the night before trying to sail to America by three men who entered lodging houses. In addition to having their passports seized, they also had a £1 “fine” imposed upon them for attempting to leave the jurisdiction without permission.⁶⁸ This was the Dáil proclamation of 1920 in practice. One of the men, Timothy Sullivan, who subsequently applied for a replacement passport, pointedly asked for it to be forwarded to the White Star Headquarters in Queenstown and not to his home address.⁶⁹ Sullivan’s letter was inquiring about his application made on 21 March, indicating his haste in departing and his determination to leave despite the sanctions imposed by the IRA. All six men immediately applied for new passports according to the American Consul.

A similar case was reported in April 1921 when Sylvester Cullen in Virginia, Cavan had his passport stolen.⁷⁰ In this instance, the application was followed up with a police investigation to establish whether Cullen was being truthful. Described in the documentation as a labourer who was 23 years old at the time of the incident, Cullen was a prime age to contribute to the guerrilla warfare the IRA were waging. In the 1911 Census, he is one of eight children in a farming family (including his twin), living in a two-roomed house – classic emigrant stock. When questioned, Cullen stated he did not want a new passport and was “at present afraid to be seen speaking to police”.⁷¹ It was concluded he was telling the truth and the application was cancelled according to his wishes. These cases raise several questions – what kind of hostilities might Cullen or his family have experienced in the aftermath of the passport seizure? How many other times did passport seizures occur without coming to the notice of authorities? Neither Sullivan nor Cullen could be found in the Witness Statements of the Bureau of Military History suggesting that they did not, perhaps, join the IRA despite being prevented from leaving the country. The tactic possibly did not work to retain or recruit men, it simply deterred some, but not all, from leaving.

John Bourke was waiting for a tram in Inchicore in Dublin on Easter Monday 1921 when he was confronted by a man who demanded his passport. Having refused, Bourke left for a local pub with his father where he was followed by his original interlocutor and surrounded by eight to ten men. They convinced him to give them the key to his luggage and removed his passport.⁷² The report does not state what happened next, but, unlike Cullen, Bourke was not deterred and was issued a new passport quickly afterwards. In each case it is noteworthy that no description or names of the men demanding documentation were requested or offered. There is often no explicit reference to them being from the IRA (the case of the Globe Hotel is an exception) and yet it is obvious from the tenor of the reports that they are. The intending emigrants are only asked for their travel documentation – they are not robbed of any valuables and for the most part do not seem to have been physically harmed. While no direct comments are made about the men’s safety in these cases, if desired, replacement passports seem to have been issued relatively quickly. Was this an acknowledgement that these men were no longer safe in their home areas?

This regulation of citizens extended beyond the ports and even the borders of Ireland. Colonial Office records reveal intending emigrants were targeted in Liverpool. In February 1921 Thomas Coleman had his passport, containing his American visa, stolen from him while he was temporarily lodging at a hotel there *en route* to the US.⁷³ In the same month twenty-two men, the majority from Roscommon, Longford, Galway and Mayo also on their way to America had their passports stolen.⁷⁴ A boarding house in Bootle was also targeted where two men, James Gibbons and Anthony Garvin, both from Louisburgh in Mayo, had their passports stolen on 29th April, but were quickly reissued with new documents.⁷⁵

Attitudes towards migrants as deserters are most starkly revealed in the case of the passport application made by Thomas Flanagan which was seized in transit and defaced – “shame on you” and “Stay at home and fight for your country” were scrawled across the photograph Flanagan posted with his forms.⁷⁶ There were also traces of gum on the outside of the envelope and inside on the pages. Flanagan, from Strokestown, had posted his application but the post in the town was seized at the beginning of March 1921.

Interestingly, police did not think the IRA did this act of defacement because it did not contain “the usual republican remarks of censorship” according to the Strokestown District Inspector, although it isn’t clarified what these would be. It was also remarked that the IRA would not have reposted the forms so that they went, defaced, to the Passport Office. The Inspector also commented that the postal officials in the area were loyal and trustworthy. So who defaced the photograph? What local sentiments, hostilities or rivalries surrounded Thomas Flanagan?⁷⁷ A note on the file suggested a postal inquiry would be useless. It has been well established that the IRA were actively disrupting mail for intelligence gathering and subversion purposes, so it may have been a strategic or opportunistic action in this case. Undeterred, however, Flanagan applied for another passport and no further incidents survive in the archival record.⁷⁸ There was a raid at the General Post Office in Dublin itself on 29 April 1921 and several passports which had been sent to get visa stamps were seized.⁷⁹ This meant that people who wished to emigrate could be easily identified through addresses which may have left them open for attack.

Conclusion

Emigration, a perennial feature of Irish life, took on overt political overtones in the revolutionary period despite its underpinning in economic need rather than politics. Underlying the dynamics of the rhetoric that demonised migration is class: an unspoken element in the discourses that drove migration and made migrants impervious to commands to stop.

Reid has argued that “the gun and the threat of violence became provocative weapons in the arguments for and against Irish self-government”.⁸⁰ Those who put themselves outside these collective, liminal spaces could not access the reified modes of masculinity prevalent at the time and were thus shunned. By leaving the country and “reneging” on their “duties” migrants were cast by nationalists as deserters. Furthermore, given the rhetoric of people like Pearse who called for the taking back of Ireland’s manhood through a show of arms, male migrants appeared to be rejecting masculinist notions that would undo “the debilitating state of effeminacy” visited upon Irish men through subordination to British rule.⁸¹ Political rhetoric in the revolutionary and post-independence era about emigrants that claimed they were traitorous, greedy or unpatriotic was pervasive. This sentiment doesn’t *originate* from the revolutionary period, but attitudes were certainly intensified at this point. Mindsets that framed emigration as somehow anti-nationalist or unpatriotic were not confined to politicians or the IRA. Indeed, this had long roots. For while the Proclamation referenced the vital support of “her exiled children in America” in staging the revolution, it seems that for others migration was always a traitorous act. By the time of the War of Independence, attitudes towards emigrants had hardened considerably.

At a time when all men were needed in the eyes of many nationalists; when guerrilla warfare characterised the conflict; when conceptions of manliness and physical bravery focused on political ideals and compromise was viewed by many as weak, to walk away, to migrate was viewed as treachery. This was a particular kind of *male* treachery. The flight of much larger numbers of women went virtually without comment in the revolutionary era (although it was to receive an exaggerated level of commentary in the following

decade).⁸² It seems women were not regarded by many nationalists as vital to the revolution despite the copious intelligence, propaganda, fund raising, first aid and auxiliary work they provided as has been documented by several scholars. Examining concepts of bravery, heroic masculinity, fighting for principles and country reveal what was valued at the time, and the lamenting over male migrants reveals that the potential contribution of men was valued more than the actual contribution of women.

Analysis of men as men, with gendered cultural expectations and norms has failed to feature significantly within the literature thus far, with notable exceptions, including contributors to this volume. This is quite the opposite when it comes to women and the revolutionary era – their experience as *women*, the ways in which their femininity was exploited, their gendered experience of violence, have all featured in scholarship. Using a gendered analysis to investigate the experiences of men during the revolution is of critical importance because as Dudink highlights, there is an inherent connection between conceptions of “the nation” and the acceptance of sharp differences in roles based on gender norms.⁸³

The focus on nationalist rhetoric that emphasised “manly” conceptions of citizenship and duty is juxtaposed in this piece with attitudes to men who migrated. In a particular vein of homo-centric nationalist discourse, the need to work – the key driving force behind most migration – was not seriously considered. The loftier aims of contributing to the national cause, of acquitting oneself with honour in a physical fight for political freedom, these are central clauses in most newspaper, pamphlet, and political commentary of the era. However, heroism does not feed hungry families.

In 1923 *The Irish Times* published an article, biblically called “Exodus”, reflecting on recent immigration restrictions to the US which resulted in a brief halt to Irish migration.⁸⁴ The paper urged caution regarding the current dip in numbers leaving the country because it did not indicate a lack of desire. It acknowledged the two opposing views of emigration; a welcome relief for impoverished families in congested districts but also an attitude they saw as being representative of the Free State government and most of the population: “A great majority of Irishmen is convinced that the country always has needed the services of all its sons and daughters, and needs them to-day more than ever”. *The Irish Times* observed that the revolutionary period had resulted in 30,000 people being unemployed which “could be doubled if one was to count the number of those due to be disbanded from the army and the prisoners released from jail”. In this context, it came to its conclusion that “mere sentiment” would not keep anyone on the island and it urged the current Ministers not to wait until it was an acute problem, but to “formulate and publish their solution – if any solution is possible – with the utmost speed”. This practical solution was not adopted; condemnation of emigrants was the more politically expedient option. Whatever differences politicians and rebels had about the Treaty, there was far less conflict about views on emigrants. Most politicians in Free State Ireland rarely expressed realistic ideas about migration, instead condemning it as an evil and in the face of the enormity of the task of tackling it, blamed emigrants rather than the systemic problems that caused them to migrate.

And what of those for whom the fight was too long, too hard, too bitter, too physically damaging? These are stories that may yet be uncovered. They may be in the witness statements collected by the Bureau of Military History but not as witnesses themselves – the names of those who fought but did not return, those who did not submit a claim for a

pension, those who were part of families where many men fought but they didn't. This "unheroic" masculinity needs to be re-evaluated if we are to be fully cognisant of the economic realities facing families in Ireland throughout the revolutionary period – they may well have been brave enough to fight but they were also brave enough to leave.

Notes

1. MacSwiney, "Battle Cry," 9.
2. Ibid., Foreword.
3. MacSwiney, "Emigration is Desertion," 5.
4. The forthcoming PhD thesis by Rebecca Mytton will do much to further illuminate these tropes. Mytton, "Revolutionary Masculinities in the IRA, 1916–1923".
5. For example, Connolly, ed. *Women and the Irish Revolution*; Frawley, ed. *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*.
6. Kimmel, "Invisible Masculinity".
7. Sinha, "Giving Masculinity a History," 445.
8. Haraway, *Modest Witness*, 28.
9. Griffin, "Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem," 377.
10. See for example, Redmond, *Moving Histories*.
11. This has been demonstrated in a later period by Ellis, "De Valera's Gains".
12. Dudink, "The Trouble with Men," 420.
13. McGaughey, *Ulster's Men*, 6.
14. Jeffery, review of McGaughey, *Ulster's Men*, 585.
15. Scott, "Gender"; Beatty, *Masculinity and Power*.
16. Horne, "Masculinity in Politics and War," 22.
17. Delaney, *Demography*, 3.
18. Commission on Emigration, *Report*, Table 28, 318–19.
19. Fitzpatrick, "Emigration 1871–1921," 606.
20. Ibid., 632.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Evidence to the Dudley Commission, as quoted in Fitzpatrick, "Irish Emigration," 624.
24. *The Vanishing Irish* is a classic example of the longevity of this discourse.
25. Beatty, *Masculinity and Power*, 1.
26. Ibid., 2.
27. For more on this see McDevitt, "Muscular Catholicism".
28. Ibid., citing Mosse, *The Image of Man*.
29. Banarjee, *Muscular Nationalism*.
30. Horne, "Masculinity in Politics and War," 28–9.
31. McGaughey, *Ulster's Men*, 22.
32. Butler, *Gender Trouble*.
33. Beaslai, "The Irish revolution".
34. MacNeill, "The North Began".
35. See note 31 above.
36. *Irish Independent*, July 24, 1914, 1, advertisement for Hearne and Co. Waterford. Irish Volunteer outfits are advertised in numerous newspapers of the period.
37. *Irish Independent*, October 15, 1914, 4.
38. *Manifesto of the Irish Volunteers*, 2–3.
39. For example, Ryan, *Gender, Identity, and the Irish Press*.
40. Ibid., 3.

41. See for example Earner-Byrne, "The Rape of Mary M," 75–98; Connolly, ed. *Women and the Irish Revolution*; Connolly, "Sexual violence in the Irish Civil War," 126–143; and Frawley, ed. *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*.
42. *The Irish Volunteer*, 1: 1, (1914), 9.
43. *Ibid.*, 3.
44. *The Irish Volunteer*, 1: 22, (1914), 1.
45. Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 150.
46. Pearse, "The Coming Revolution," 98.
47. MacNeill and Kettle, "Orders," 14.
48. *The Irish Volunteer*, 11.
49. *Ibid.*, 4.
50. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
51. *The Irish Volunteer*, 1:17 (1915), training is covered on multiple pages.
52. *Ibid.*, 4.
53. Searches conducted using the digitised database of the newspaper available from the Military Archives.
54. Sisson, *Pearse's Patriots*; Walsh, *Boy Republic*; and Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse, inter alia*.
55. Pearse, *The Coming Revolution*, 97.
56. Tosh, "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society," 342.
57. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*.
58. Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, 62.
59. For a copy of Skinnider's application for a Military Pension based on her service in 1916 see the Military Service Pensions Collection, MSP34REF19910. http://mspcsearch.militaryarchives.ie/docs/files/PDF_Pensions/R1/1P724MARGARETSKINNIDER/W1P724MARGARETSKINNIDER.pdf.
60. For example, *The Irish Citizen*, Vol.2:28, (1915), 6.
61. Dáil Éireann Proclamation, July 24, 1920, NLI, EPH E15.
62. Dáil Éireann Debate -Friday, August 6, 1920, Vol. F No. 16. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1920-08-06/40/?highlight%5B0%5D=emigrating>.
63. Dáil Éireann Debate – Tuesday, June 29, 1920, Vol. F No. 15. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1920-06-29/4/?highlight%5B0%5D=3%2C836>.
64. Quoted in I.O, *The Administration of Ireland*, 178.
65. Foster, *Vivid Faces*, xix.
66. There are numerous letters and reports relating to this incident in Colonial Office File CO 904/170, NLI.
67. From Witness Statement of Joseph O'Carroll, Bureau of Military History, Document Number WS728.
68. Letter from Mason Mitchell, American Consular Service, Queenstown, to the Passport Office, Dublin Castle, March 18, 1921, Colonial Office File CO 904/170, NLI.
69. Letter from Timothy Sullivan to the Chief Secretary of the Passport Office, April 11, 1921, Colonial Office File CO 904/170, NLI. Note that he signs his name Sullivan but is noted on the back of the letter as O'Sullivan.
70. Letter to F.T.F. Dumont, American Consul, May 5, 1921, author unknown, CO 904/170, NLI.
71. File No. 5661, Minute Sheet between Passport Office, Dublin Castle and Office of District Inspector Balieborough, Cavan, Colonial Office File CO 904/170, NLI.
72. Letter from Branch Passport Office, Liverpool, to Under Secretary, Passport Office, Dublin Castle, March 30, 1921.
73. Letter from F.T.F. Dumont, American Consul, to the Secretary of the Passport Bureau, Dublin Castle, February 1921 (no exact date given), Colonial Office File CO 904/170, NLI.
74. Letter to Mr. Martin from Branch Passport Office, Liverpool, February 21, 1921, Colonial Office File CO 904/170, NLI. Four of the men had addresses in England and two in Belfast.
75. Letter from Branch Passport Office to unspecified recipient, May 3, 1921, Colonial Office File CO 904/170, NLI.
76. File Number 8734, Minute Sheet dated March 19, 1921, Colonial Office File CO 904/170, NLI.

77. It has not been possible to identify Thomas Flanagan in Census records. There are two possible candidates: Thomas Flanagan age 24 in 1911 and a Catholic farmer's son or Thomas Flanagan age 18 in 1911 and also a Catholic farmer's son. Both are residents of Clooncor, Strokestown, Co. Roscommon.
78. We do not know the outcome of this application and given the uncertainty about his identity he is difficult to trace in genealogical databases.
79. Noted in Colonial Office File CO 904/170, NLI.
80. Reid, "The Irish Party and the Volunteer Crisis", 33.
81. This phrase comes from a paper by Stefan Dudink, Radboud University Nijmegen, "Citizenship, Mass Mobilization and Masculinity in a Transatlantic Perspective, 1770s–1870s" read at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Genders, and Sexualities, Hofstra University, in June 2017. Dudink has developed his work on effeminacy in "Citizenship, Mass Mobilization, and Masculinity in a Transatlantic Perspective, 1770s–1870s".
82. See Redmond, *Moving Histories* for more on this point.
83. Dudink, "Multipurpose Masculinities", 6.
84. *The Irish Times*, May 9, 1923, 4.

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