

Nets of Memory (Líonta na Cuimhne): 19th century Irish Mediations of Remembrance and Belonging

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To a 19th century Irish islander living in America, a fishing net was not just an economic tool, or object, or asset; rather it provided a point of entry into the emotional landscape of memory and belonging. Emigrants from rural settings, including the islands of western Ireland, traveled to America to establish better lives for themselves, their relatives, and their future offspring, often in new and very challenging urban settings. In the case of islanders, they left their homes, the seascapes that framed their lives, and entered into a new placelessness. Migration is, above all else, a dissociative event, one that fundamentally challenges an individual's sense of place, of home, and identity, and creates moments in which individuals reside in one place, but "belong" in another place. As an altruistic, intergenerational act, migration challenges personal and community frameworks of belonging, identity and the material topographies of memory.

Combining oral history, folklore and documentary records, the film *Nets of Memory (Líonta na Cuimhne)* explores how 19th to 21st century Islanders from Inishark and Inishbofin, County Galway, Ireland, continued to make fishing nets and *Currachs*, small fishing boats with a wooden frame and covered in canvas, once they migrated. These practices, as well as their music, helped islanders make their past meaningful through the repeated reenacting of crafts, and negotiate their place in the New World. *Nets of Memory* tells the story of multiple families, both from the past and present, to show how islanders create frameworks of memory and dealt with moving to America. Existing within multiple worlds, all migrants exist in a precarious space; balanced between an economic reality and potential of the present, and the cultural landscape, people, and memories of their past.