An Outcome of Many Wars: Irish Democracy in the Follow-Up to the Period of Independence and Further Possibilities

Um resultado de muitas guerras: A democracia irlandesa no pós-independência e outras possibilidades

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Abstract*: An explanation for the success of Irish democracy is the presence of competing views about Ireland, where "wars" did not correspond to a "neat" victorious side. It can be linked to the Easter Rising of 1916, the Anglo-Irish Treaty dispute, and the ensuing Civil War. "High politics" also presents similar divisions and a sort of acceptance of the limits of a single narrative. The Irish political system, to a large extent a remnant of what existed before independence, plays a significant role in the process. It is worth highlighting PR-STV, canvassing, and political representatives' clinics. As a whole, I emphasise the relevance of value orientated readings of democracy. The concept of "little voices" is useful to sum up the overall context, translating what is present in the explicit scenario into the more "daily" operation of Irish politics. It reflects the interplay between "people", their "little voices", shifting, and their relation to the broader political scenarios. Several dimensions of violence remained, explicit in the treatment of travellers, women and children, asylum seekers, homeless. The expansion of room for little voices may constitute a foregoing contribution of Ireland to the creation of (un) worlds, and therefore to world democracy.*

Keywords*: Irish Democracy; Irish Political System; "Little Voices"; Appraisals of Democracy.*

Resumo: *Uma explicação para o sucesso da democracia irlandesa é a presença de concepções diversas sobre a Irlanda, em que "guerras" não correspondem a um lado vitorioso nítido. Isto pode estar relacionado ao Levante da Páscoa de 1916, às disputas em torno do Tratado Anglo-Irlandês e à Guerra Civil que se seguiu. A "alta política" apresenta divisões análogas e certa aceitação dos limites de uma narrativa única. O sistema político irlandês, em grande parte remanescente do que existia antes da independência, desempenha um papel significativo no processo. Vale a pena destacar o PR-STV, o* canvassing *e as* clinics *oferecidas pelos*

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representantes políticos. Assim enfatizo a importância de leituras da democracia orientadas por valores. O conceito de "pequenas vozes" é útil para apreender o contexto geral, traduzindo o que se apresenta em termos da operação mais "cotidiana" da política irlandesa. Reflete a interconexão entre "pessoas", suas "pequenas vozes", mutantes, e sua relação com os cenários políticos mais amplos. Diversas dimensões de violência permaneceram, explicitadas na lide com o grupo étnico constituído pelos Travellers*, com mulheres e crianças, com* Asylum seekers *e com sem-teto. A abertura de espaço para pequenas vozes pode constituir uma contribuição da Irlanda para a criação de (des)mundos e, assim, para a democracia no mundo.*

Palavras-chave: *Democracia irlandesa; Sistema político irlandês; "Pequenas vozes"; Aporias de democracia.*

An Opening

The year of 2022 marks the one hundredth anniversary of the Irish Free State, which has remained democratic since its foundation. Furthermore, Irish democracy can arguably be viewed as one of the main contributions of Ireland to the world. There were many "wars" taking place behind such democracy. Perhaps the acceptance that stressing an obvious winning side would represent a return to "open wars" was key to its success. This points to the broader possibility that "Socratic" readings, whether of societies, political realms, or sociological entities, are conducive to wars.

"Little voices" (Portela) can be found everywhere. These are intersected by their multiple belongings. The little voices shift, as does belonging. Its main characteristic might well be its fleetness. They are, nevertheless, always present. The room they get in the big hall of life, or, to be more conspicuous, in the broader social and political representation, might be a key to effective democratic events, which is the main suggestion of this article.

I. The 1916 Easter Rising as Personal

Irish democracy is known for its "resilience". Huntington includes it in his "A group", i.e., those which belonged to the "first wave" of democracy and lasted throughout the second and third "waves" and "reverse waves". To some extent, it lasted against the odds. In the 1960s, Lipset's correlation between socio-economic indicators and democratic potential was quite influential, however Ireland was a case that was hard to fit into this. More recently, Kissane tried to show that an enlarged reading of the indicators conducive to polyarchy in the period before and after Independence suggested a revision of the

exceptionality of Irish experience. In his 1987 book, Tom Garvin has pointed to the relevance of the mentality of the generation that led the separation from Great Britain and Ireland's government after the Treaty, as well as to the leading political trends after the separation, as key to the democratic outcome. Also significant within this context is Munger's highlighting the importance of the pacific transition of power from *Cumannn na nGaedheal* to *Fianna Fáil* in 1932.

The Easter Rising of 1916 is widely accepted as a turning point in Irish socio-political history. Bew, Hazelkorn, and Patterson (*The Dynamics of Irish Politics* 15), Boyce (*Nationalism in Ireland* 295), and Kee (*The Green Flag* 1) are among the many authors who stress the powerful impact of the 15 executions (16 when Roger Casement is included) on public opinion and on the creation of an unprecedented "national" feeling, moving away from the previous political arena, strongly centred around Home Rule and the Irish Parliamentary Party. Michael Collins became a key figure in the following events, including the reshaping of Sinn Féin, as expressed in the February 1917 by-election in Roscommon (Kee 23), the year Collins had returned from Britain. Collins had been a member of the IRB (Irish Republican Brotherhood) since before the 1916 Rising and would dominate it afterwards. In the same year Eamon de Valera, who was soon to become the "other" key figure in Irish politics, was released from prison and won a by-election in East Clare. In the 1918 elections, "Sinn Féin received 46.9% of votes island-wide, and 65% of votes in the area that became the Irish Free State" (Wikipedia a), electing 69 candidates. These formed the First *Dáil*, refusing to take their seats at Westminster and creating a parliament in Dublin.

There are a myriad of details in the "behind the scenes" processes that led to the Anglo-Irish War and the infamous Black and Tans in Ireland. Frank O'Connor's biography of Michael Collins, *The Big Fellow*, highlights the latter's importance in the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, the Treaty debates in the *Dáil*, and the subsequent Civil War, that saw Collins killed in August 1922. Of those elected in 1921, 65 took the pro-Treaty side, led by Collins amongst others, while 57 opposed it, led by De Valera. On 16 June 1922 a general election took place in "Southern Ireland". Although a pact had been agreed between pro- and anti-Treaty representatives in May 1922, the division between them was overwhelming, leading to the anti-Treaty side boycotting the Second Provisional Government under W. T. Cosgrave, which appointed the First Executive of the Irish Free State on 6 December 1922. In the June election, "Out of a valid poll of 621,587 votes, the pro-Treaty faction of Sinn Féin won 239,195 votes and the anti-Treaty faction won 135,310 votes" (Wikipedia b). This was when the Proportional Representation Electoral System – PR-STV single transferable vote – first came to be used. Twelve days after this

election the Civil War broke out, with the Provisional Government forces bombarding the Four Courts in Dublin, that had been occupied by the anti-Treaty IRA. On 30 April 1923 the IRA leadership declared a suspension of military activities and a ceasefire ensued on 24 May (Wikipedia c).

Around the centenary of the Rising, TG4, the Irish language television channel, produced and broadcasted the series 1916 *Seachtar na Cásca* (*The Seven of Easter*), about the seven signatories of the Declaration of the Republic and 1916 *Seachtar Dearmadta* (*The Forgotten Seven*) about the others executed in the aftermath of the Rising, as well as episodes on Roger Casement, Michael Collins and Countess Markievicz. At the same time, Lorcan Collins and Ruán O'Donnell edited a series entitled *16 Lives*, presenting biographies of Casement and the other 15 men killed. In April 2016 commemorations were held in Dublin, during which "Hundreds of thousands of people lined the streets of Dublin for the largest public spectacle in the history of the State" (RTÉ).

What this highlights is that the "personal" dimension the Rising came to assume has meaning because it is "filled"; it reflects people, their shifting interactions, reflections, ideas, values. It is possible to consider those killed and many others who took part in the Rising, as insoumis, in the sense coined by Todorov, having in common "*le refus de se soumettre docilement à la contrainte*"[1] (33). Further, what the interest and "sharing" in the celebration also illustrates is a connection with the insubmission in "the Many", the latter a notion Sheldon Wollin developed so brilliantly, presented in the Rising. In more mundane and daily political language, it can be said that Irish democracy derives strength and pervasiveness from the "acceptance" of such personal aspects, the capability of taking into account "parts" of the, constantly shifting, "Many"; its insubmission as it were.

II. Pain and Turmoil

By any standards, an enormous amount of significant events occurred between the Easter Rising and the creation of the Irish Free State and the Civil War. The Irish War of Independence, also known as the Anglo-Irish War, and especially the vicious actions of the Black and Tans, with what may be seen to include indiscriminate "personal" attacks on civilians and property, hugely contributed to the spread of an anti-British public opinion. In mid-1921, as is well known, a Truce was declared. Towards the end of the year a group of representatives went to London and negotiated what became officially the "Articles of Agreement for a Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland". The process was very convoluted, notably in relation to the wording put into force at different stages and the status of the Irish plenipotentiaries. Following all the details is difficult, but many of

these were brought to the fore and used as weapons in the ensuing Treaty Debates, the recognition of the Irish Free State, and the Irish Civil War. It may be said that at first such wars were still part of a political group, an enlarged group that saw itself and was publicly perceived as leading the process. The Treaty Debates and, especially, the Civil War and the years that followed it meant, nevertheless, that it became widespread, and a symptom of the, at least relative, capture of politics in the Irish State by dimensions of the Many. It also meant that, although the Free Staters won and came to be in government, that was only a partial victory, much less significant than the sense of multiplicity – something quite broader than opposition – that prevailed throughout. This is core to understanding the pervasiveness of Irish democracy.

The *Dáil* sessions debating the "Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland, signed in London on 6 December 1921" ran from 14 December 1921 to 7 January 1922, with the vote taking place on 7 January. As a result, 64 voted in favour of the Treaty and 57 against. A similar figure also resulted from the vote on 10 January for the re-election of Éamon de Valera, who had stepped down as president of the *Dáil*. He failed to be re-elected, with Arthur Griffith being elected instead, this time by 60 to 58 votes (Doherty & Hickey 200). The first access I gained to these debates was through the UCC CELT project (Ó Corráin). Nowadays, it is easily found in the "Debates" section of the page of the Houses of the *Oireachtas*.

As part of the Decade of the Centenaries, *Staging the Treaty*, the playscript entitled "The Treaty," by Colin Murphy, was staged as a two-day immersive theatre experience, being held twice in the National Concert Hall, the former council chamber of University College Dublin, where the debates actually took place (Fishamble). Several other events concerning the Treaty Debates took place around the country. In his Irish Times article, McGreevy believes that "the debates were the most extraordinary event in Irish parliamentary history, suffused with a passion which is hard to understand, knowing what we know now, by people who had endured danger, jail and bereavement." The wounds at stake were profound, and surely much of what was put forward then derived from them. Among the six women who took part in the debates, deep personal pain and sorrow seems to have played a fundamental part. In a way, it was overall though, which may help explaining why more "mundane" issues played such a small role. McGreevy goes on to mention: "In a fascinating word cloud experiment published in the book *The Treaty: Debating and Establishing the Free State*, edited by Liam Weeks and Mícheál Ó Fathartaigh, researchers found that the words economic /economical /economy appeared just 52 times". Another article by Nic Dháibhéid, drawing on *Ireland 1922* (Gannon and McGarry), highlights

the emotional dimensions of the Treaty Debates and the connection it had with the larger Irish public. The debates

> . . . unfolded in a curious mixture of publicity and privacy: the public sessions were avidly reported in the national and provincial press, with particular attention paid to the tone and mood of the chamber, while even the comings and goings to the closed sessions were closely followed for hints of the debates' progress. The emotional register of the Treaty debates thus formed a significant part of how the Irish public learned about the emerging split in the republican movement.

The photo at the beginning of both articles is the same, showing a huge crowd, intensely looking at something "in common":

Photo 1: Crowd outside Earlsfort Terrace
Photo: NLI The Independent Newspapers (Ireland) Collection: Call no: INDH112A

There are several pictures of large public gatherings in Ireland, including those associated with rallies held not so long before by the Irish Parliamentary Party – a feature that probably should be brought back to the "monster" rallies held by Daniel O'Connell during the campaigns for Catholic Emancipation and Repeal. The particularity of those surrounding the Treaty Debates is therefore not so much the amount of people as their involvement in the "spreading" of the pain, emotions, and division, sometimes quite blurred, existing, I believe, both between individuals and at an intimate level in each person.

In the aftermath of the Treaty debates, a multitude of violent events occurred, both in "The North" and in "Southern Ireland", apart from disputes between the Provisional Government and British authorities. These more or less "inevitably" led to the Civil War. On 16 June a general election was held in the Free State, although this was not a "common" election. The results were Pro-Treaty, 58; Anti-Treaty, 36; Labour, 17; Farmers,

7; Independents, 6; University of Dublin (T.C.D.), 4. On 18 June, anti-Treaty forces occupied the Four Courts and other areas of the capital. After an ultimatum issued by Michael Collins (under pressure from London), the bombardment of the Four Courts by Provisional Government forces on 28 June marked the beginning of the Civil War. Two days later the Four Courts were abandoned by the Republican garrison, blowing up the Public Record Office before surrendering (Doherthy & Hickey 202-3), a sort of prior indicator to what Ferriter points out: the "battle to control the labelling and narrative of the war began during it" (5). Within that context, it became even more important, he defends, for historiography "to do emotion justice and be less judgemental", a way "to 'bring the war back' to those who fought it." (8)

III. Units and Democracies

Any Civil War represents a deep split. The main point is a split into which "unit". The Irish Civil War meant a split between groups, families, individuals. I previously phrased this as "since we were all on the other faction what do we do now?" (Portela 336). There are further dimensions, significant in terms of understanding what happened and the possible contributions of the Irish process to broadening the sense of democracy. Things were emotional, personal, in both senses of the word – a people split and persons' splits. Trying to understand the Irish context, I developed the concept of "little voices" to explain the multitude of people's dimensions that are present but not covered by the more "substantial" categories social sciences normally use. In a way, it aims to point to the fact that "life", thoughts, emotions, social interactions and allegiances are not a permanent feature, instead they are quite shifting and there is a political dimension attached. Not to allow room for this is often linked to autocratic attempts, whether in "science" or in "politics", with pernicious consequences, also at the more personal, "intimate" level.

Jacques Rancière brilliantly stated how democracy ought to be understood as the realm of a myriad of public open possibilities if its full potential is brought to the fore:

> Democracy is not the modern 'abandonment of limitation' that destroys the heterotopy necessary to politics. Quite the opposite, it is the founding force of such heterotopy, the first limitation to the power of the authority forms that rule the social body . . . The democratic process is the process of that perpetual put at stake, of that invention of forms of subjectivation and verification that contradict the perpetual privatization of public life. In this sense, democracy means the impurity of politics, the rejection of governments' pretension to embody a single principle of public life and, in such, to circumscribe the understanding and extension of public life (61-81).

As Yarbrough elaborates at length, for Rancière, as for Sheldon Wolin and Hannah Arendt, what is at stake is the possibility of going beyond a mere opposition between genuine and ordinary democracy:

> The reclamation of politics comes from the disruption of established structures. Short of overthrow, genuine democracy seeks to re-organize the petrification of ordinary democracy allowing greater movement. Genuine democracy is not a fight lacking in all structure, rather, it uses existing structure to push against, gaining momentum from that which contains it (30).

Such a broad view of democracy, or the referred concept of "little voices", is not something "directly" needed to explain the formal success of Irish democracy. More "common" aspects were undoubtedly fundamental, pertaining to the realm of "high politics", such as the mentality of political leaders (Garvin a), of which the peaceful transition of power from *Cumann na nGaedheal* to *Fianna Fáil* (explain) in 1932 was an outstanding example (Munger). The "soft" maintenance of "English" political institutions was another relevant trace, a sort of "regular" background that allowed a "regular" public political life to develop. Allegiance to a broad democratic perspective by all governments, whether majoritarian or, as has been the denominator since the mid 1990's, coalitions is undoubtfully fundamental. Nevertheless, the close monitoring of governments' actions, interest in background events, the popularity of parodic and ironic press columns and books about politics, interest in and "familiarity" with main political figures, past and present, all point to a sort of lasting "control" of what is played on the more obvious political stage, a central trait of Irish democracy absent from what more common "academic" appraisals take into account.

The electoral system, PR-STV (Proportional Representation - Single Transferable Vote), was and is certainly an important feature. It can be said that it went well beyond the originally envisaged idea of ensuring minority representation central to Stuart Mill's conception, through its many possible uses of ranking, and therefore transferring, preferences for candidates, as well as its widespread and enthusiastic use. When one ranks candidates, with or without transfers calculations in mind, there is a strong element of "staging" possibilities of participation in the political representational fore that will come out of elections. As such, it became a symbol of Irish democracy, reflected in the defeat of the two referenda, promoted by *Fianna Fáil*, proposing to change it. Similarly, canvassing and clinics held by incumbents and hopeful candidates play a very important role. Canvassing, much of it on a personal basis, is crucial to succeed in obtaining and maintain a seat, and something expected from the electorate. This can be read as a form of "personal

encounter" between those seeking positions in the open political arena and the people that might vote for them. The obligation of "being there", "showing themselves", as a person, is strong and might enforce the idea that the incumbents, at the local, county councillors, or national level, TDs - *Téachta Dála*, are only legitimate if they effectively "spring" from their electors, whom, at least to some extent, have come to know "personally".

It is difficult to ascertain how clinics began, albeit Irish immigrants in the United States were able to rely on personal help from "prominent" former residents from their arrival, part of an "Irish personal net" in the new country. The dimension and significance clinics assume in Ireland is hard to describe. As Paddy Lysaght writes, in his humorous *How to become a successful TD*: "It has become fashionable, indeed necessary, for TDs to have a room or rooms available where their constituents can come for advice and to discuss their problems. These are, for some reason, called clinics (44)". The detailed diagram on the next page shows articles strategically positioned: a "hard chair for constituents", a "basket filled with paper", pictures of Robert Emmet, John F. Kennedy and Pádraig Pearse on the wall, a "supply of government forms", and a "pen in hand" – of the TD, of course. The hilarious tone starts in its the cover:

> The author tells how he entered politics, became a County Councillor, rose through the ranks, became a TD; of his early days in the *Dáil*, the 'honest deception' he uses to hold on to his vote, how he catches the floating vote; he outlines the strategy of attending funerals and functions, explains how a TD should select the ideal wife, tells how to get more out of golf than health and sport, how to benefit from inside information, how to keep awkward and clever civil servants on one's side.

It expresses the sort of "serious-joke" associated with politics and politicians, as present nowadays for instance in the weekly column of Miriam Lord in *The Irish Times*, or, with a somehow broader scope, in Donal Foley's column *Man Bites Dog*, initially published on that newspaper from 1971 to 1981, with the collected volumes that resulted of it. The point I am trying to make is that irony, together with "personification", is an important feature to take into account regarding "effective" characteristics of the functioning of Irish democracy.

IV. Wars, Violence, Narratives

Atrocities were committed by both "sides" in the Civil War. In Kerry alone in March 1923: five National Army soldiers were killed by a trap mine in Knocknagoshel on the 6th;

eight Republican soldiers killed, while tied to a log by a mine thrown amongst them in Ballyseedy on the 7th (Crowley, and Sheehan 278; Doherty, and Hickey 205). Their role in "rememberance", "narrative wars" still lingers:

> in the context of the looming decade of centenaries of events central to the Irish revolution, thirty-two-year-old Fine Gael minister Leo Varadkar . . . in a clear break with his predecessors, made no bones about events such as the Ballyseedy mine outrage in 1923: "people killed without trial by the first government were murdered". But passions never fully burned out; three years later a monument to the dead of the Knocknagoshel atrocity in 1923 was vandalised; it had been unveiled the previous year and in the audience was the son of the sole Ballyseedy survivor, Stephen Fuler (Ferriter 242).

In the Civil War scenario, the division, the "other", the enemy was supposedly clear – despite the confusion and pain that might be attached to such classification. At another "obvious" level, the Free Staters were the winning side. To curb the fracture to something manageable, while also dealing with British threats, might be an explanation for the strictness, and, albeit somehow anachronistically, technocratic way the country was ruled by *Cumman nGaedheal*, (which later became Fine Gael), in ways well described by Garvin (b). It was also the path related to the handing of government power in 1932 and the "unifying" role the Catholic Church came to play, especially under de Valera, as argued by Fanning: "Latter day critics of the state's identification with the Catholic religion and with the Irish language as embodied in de Valera's constitution too easily lose sight of their function as device for bonding together a deeply divided people" (177). The figures of Michael Collins and Éamon de Valera came to epitomize the two sides, their contrasting personalities, life spans, personally and politically, in a way "attitudes" towards the "meaning" of Ireland – as a "unit". The amount of academic and more popular publications about them is vast and still ongoing, with few critical voices (Ferriter) to the "pleasant" symmetry offered. And yet...

Other types of "narrative wars" have existed in the literary and historiographic fields. In the former, disputes around "language" issues are connected, albeit not always explicitly, to the meaning of "Irishness" or the kind of "unity" at stake. The scope is wide, from Moran's Gaelic manhood, through Corkery's "revelation" of the "hidden Ireland", Kiberd's defence of the colonial (shared) experience as the relevant background to understand Irish literature in English, to Sean O'Fáolain's exaltation of the link between democracy and the "individual", as present in *Vive Moi!* (1963). Readings of "what was"

project shadows, or derive one might say, from desires to define "what is", clearly without a winning side (Portela 69-126). The "battle" between historians labelling "themselves and others" as "nationalists" and "revisionists", can be traced at least to the 1960's, though it gained renewed strength a few of decades ago. In a way, it is linked to the belief that "history" could be a weapon with which to fight current struggles, hence historians' responsibility to produce a "true" historiography, directly connected to the presumption that they bear the knowledge and define the role to be given to it. There clearly is no winning side in the debate. Terry Eagleton jokes that "there's too much of this [history] around in Ireland (98)", a phrase useful to describe the effective familiarity and frequency with which historiographic issues are talked about in Ireland, in ways that go well further than the academic debates (Portela 128-271). Albeit maybe stereotypically, "talkativeness" is often said to be an "Irish" attribute. Many forms of talking, different kinds of "literature" and "historiography" one may say, are daily practised, through different means and at different levels of interaction. They constitute an element that helps preventing univocity and shapes both the broader and the specific political spheres of Irish democracy. In sum, they shape its movement in a multiplicity of directions which wars cannot contain.

The abundant production and publication of historiography and literary academic works contrasts with its relative scarcity around sociological issues, strongly orientated more towards political and historiographical sociology or social policy, and with almost none on social anthropological ones (basically circumscribed to Northern Ireland). Such aspect is coherent with a strong absence of emigration, emigrants, policies regarding return to Ireland, working conditions and labour relations, homelessness, and, more recently, refugees, asylum seekers and direct provision. There are studies and reports of course, but foremost, arguably, a lack of deeper efforts to reflect on it. Ferriter quotes Kelleher, writing in 1957 that the sad "truth is that there has been no push at all in the Irish political situation since before the war. Instead of vocal discontent, there is silent emigration; and in what emigration leaves behind there is apathy below and smugness above" (227). In *Preventing the Future*, regarding the decades from 1920 to 1950, Garvin (c) offers a picture that relates to this:

> Quite apart from the 1921 divisions, there was also a clear anti-modernist streak in Irish official and clerical thinking, generating a reluctance to engage seriously with the modern world. (...) After all, if one really wanted modernity, one could go next door to England or over the Atlantic to America, where there was plenty of the thing. In turn, these mentalités encouraged a cultural pessimism, passivity or even hopelessness (4-5).

Travellers, who would normally "fit in" the "ethnic" characterisation, are perhaps one of the most significant absences, as Mary Robinson kind of addresses 'gently,' in her preface to McCann, Siocháin, and Ruane's collection, much centred on the idea of "minority rights", published in Belfast:

> The story of the travelling people is our story also. Too often, it has been a narrative of our anxiety and resistance to difference. Yet in the relation between a settled and a travelling community there are precious and important possibilities for dialogue. It is a dialogue which cannot happen unless perceptions shift and perceptions will not shift until understanding replaces fear (ix).

More generally, one can say "absence", in contrast with the almost hyperbolic "presence" of public figures and explicit political developments, is the mark "imposed" on the Many, to go back to Wolin's concept. Emigrants, travellers, workers, dole receivers, homeless, asylum seekers, also women, children, "fools", "disadvantaged", "elderly" may figure in reports and statistics but seldom are the subject of reflections that include them, more than as categories, their shifting lives, thoughts, relations... and politics. Such "exclusion" derives, on the one hand, from a "presumption" about their lower significance. On the other hand, also because such presumption is "known" to be false, it did not exclude, much to the contrary, attempts to exert control over them, as people if not as categories. Their "little voices", as groups and people, in its depth, inner variety and shifting movements through life, were nevertheless a central part in the success of Irish democracy.

V. Short Stories, Pictures, Little Voices

Frank O'Connor's 1931 story "Guests of a Nation" is set during the Anglo-Irish War. It agonistically points to what the divide is made of, the split, painfully and emotionally, when the "personal" ends and people become "others", "enemies". Furthermore, despite having fought on the "other side", in 1937 O'Connor was able to create an intimate and lively "biography" of Michael Collins, *The Big Fellow*. Meaningfully, he tried to address profound dimensions of Collin's and how he shaped the "reality" of the time he lived through. In the book, apart from the "objective" events highlighted, O'Connor makes Collins emerge as a character, a person, much broader than being a winner or a looser in a war, beyond any definition of "unity". In the more obvious political arena it took some time but, as Ferriter mentions, citing Peter Mair who was quoting the *Fianna Fáil* leader Jack Lynch, after his resignation in 1979, marking an end to the obvious era of "division": "In the old days ... one was either pro-de Valera or anti-de Valera,

or pro-Lemass or anti-Lemass, or neither and then one supported Labour." (235) This might be summed up as "unity" being a twin to "otherness", and that "enmity" had ended in the political realm. Multiplicity, events, emotions, memories, encounters are material with which writers deal. There is some extent of "control", but the tapestry goes well beyond it, as O'Connor beautifully crafts in the two volumes of his autobiography, written more than a decade previously.

It is not too farfetched to link such "unity" and the idea of "winners and losers" to a wish for clear and straightforward allegiances, a definition of who is "in" and who is "out" easily spreading to the targeting of those who are "out" – whether it is addressed or controlled in the manner of not disturbing the "obvious" peace. There are probably several other dimensions at play but this helps explaining "Irish deals" regarding abuse against women and children, mental illness, Travellers, workers, unemployed, farmer's towns and villages, homeless, emigration, or, bringing it more to the present, refugees and asylum seekers in Direct Provision, among so many possible "categories". In plain old terms, it is the creation of an "otherness" linked to the rigidification of a sense of "oneness" – and the *culchie - jackeen* (i.e. countryside - Dubliners) divide also springs to mind. Voices should not come from places that were not clearly opened, known and therefore controlled. The "presences" were always there; their existence much broader than, but also part of the functioning of politics, the success of Irish democracy. Looked at from another perspective, the amount written, academically and otherwise, about political events and figures, high politics, was a way to make it personal, and somewhat control it.

The deep effects of the 1916-22 period and the Civil War were the subject of many brilliant novels and short stories. Brian Moore's *An Answer from Limbo* (1962), *Cold Heaven* (1983), *Lies of Silence* (1990), John McGahern's *The Barracks* (1963), *The Dark* (1965), *Getting Through* (1978), *Amongst Women* (1990), "Korea" (1993), and more recently Nessa O'Mahony's *The Branchman* (2018), amongst many more, deal with its presence at all levels of life, the confusion, the violence that springs from attempts to keep acting from efforts to remain creating an "otherness", an "enmity", and its control. One may say also to control the many sides of oneself, "emotions", just to evoke those which emerged around the Treaty Debates. The twin side of this was the denial and violence perpetrated against women and children, as became widely known in the last decades.

John Banville, first under the pen name of Benjamin Black, in the "Quirke series", notably in *Holy Orders* (2013), and more recently in the follow-ups under his own name, *Snow* (2020) and *April in Spain* (2021), builds on the profound damages that widespread control and secrecy produced. Nevertheless, only part of the novels,

short stories, poems that abound spring from the shadows and wounds of the Civil War. Two songs by Sigerson Clifford, "The Ballad of the Tinker's Daughter" and "The Ballad of the Tinker's Son", from Tim Dennehy's album *Between the Mountains and the Sea* (2003) and John McGahern's *Creatures of the Earth*, are examples of a multitude of narratives where wide meaningful dimensions came into play. John MacKenna beautifully introduces *We Seldom Talk about the Past* with:

> The thing that first intrigued me about short stories ... was the sense of absence they brought, the inconclusiveness, the wonder of the unfinished. I've always thought of short stories as photographs. We see what we see, but what came before the moment and what follows the moment can only be guessed (1).

Not everything can be classified under "short stories" but fortunately much can. Daily talks and interactions share the same fleetness – and sense of hope (or doom) and the future. Personal, emotional, social dimensions are at stake all the time, making part of life and of political life. In the end, maybe a little more than an immense myriad of short stories constitute (Irish) political life, which is in itself an understanding that could be a nice contribution of Ireland's wars to a deepening of democracy. Any kind of narrative is somehow a unit, distant from a "unity". Consciously or not, it affects and springs from academic and literally training, politics, but mostly from people, talks, emotions, streams of thought, music, sounds, images.

I would like to conclude with some photographs that pervaded my current narrative, the moment it was written and its hopeful sharing the inconclusiveness of Irish democracy. Out of many possibilities, I selected a "group of children", "commissioned by Rev. Father Coghlantaken on 1915", travellers in a decorated caravan and a traveller child, St. Finan's psychiatric hospital, a memorial in Tuam, and the direct provision centre in Athlone.

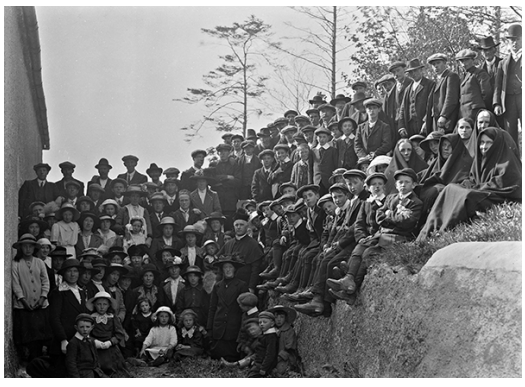

Photo 2: "group of children," 1915
https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-1916/1916irl/people/

Photo 3 (left): Traveller's caravan, 1954. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Travellers
Photo 4 (right): https://www.creativeboom.com/inspiration/growing-up-travelling-photographs-that-reveal-the-inside-world-of-irish-traveller-children

Photo 5: : St. Finan's psychiatric hospital
https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/cruelty-and-abuse-of-power-were-not-the-preserve-of-religious-orders-1.4479202

Photo 6 (left): Memorial in Tuam's mother and baby home
https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/mother-and-baby-homes
Photo 7 (right): Direct Provision Centre in Athlone. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Direct_provision

A Closing

The separation from Great Britain meant a move away from such "unity", and the engagement in the expectation of some "common thing", as hinted in the photo of the crowd during the Treaty Debates. It had sprung from many wars against the "enemy", notably the 1916 Rising and the Anglo-Irish (War of Independence). The Civil War ensued and with it the rebuilding of an "enemy", correlated to attempts to ensure a "unity" existed, despite haziness having prevailed.

The Free Staters won the Civil War, the government led by Cosgrave imposed harsh policies, power was handed peacefully to *Fianna Fáil* in 1932, and the Catholic Church cloak covered society. Absences and abuses of the Many became a deep mark. *Fine Gael – Fianna Fáil* allegiances pervaded, despite Labour, farmers and independents keeping significative political presence.

There were no major changes in the political institutions and structures associated with the separation from Great Britain. Within this scope, the electoral system (PR-STV), despite being introduced in 1918, became a very important trait of Irish democracy, along with canvassing and clinics.

Political figures and events were/are object of many academic and more popular works, which partially constitutes a way for the Many to exert control over it. There were/are academic wars, mostly in the literary and historiographical domains. Notable in this sense, is the relative "absence" of academic interest in "common categories" of people. Irish literary production is by any standards very significant. Many are deeply present in novels and short stories, related to a "merging" of its authors in the weaving of life, therefore of politics and democracy.

I believe the concept of "little voices" (Portela) is important to explain the success of Irish democracy. At the more "formal" level in the manner that their "representation" occurs through PR-STV, canvassing, and clinics, as well as in the "public" interest related to politicians and policies. At a more "fuzzy" level, under this guarantee politics remains a "personal" dimension, several, necessarily shifting, dimensions of life "interfere" in this realm, as such not allowed to divert into tyranny. Irish democracy was/is not ideal in either sense of the word. Nevertheless, especially in relation to what comes to the presence of "little voices", it can contribute to deepening senses of democracy. Maybe a sort of "centenary gift" could reside in helping to question "unity", therefore promoting the possibilities an enlarged democracy can bring.

Notes

[1] "the refusal to obediently submit to coercion".

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