

Remembering and Forgetting in Public and Private:

Reflections on the Dualities of Irish Civil War Memory in the 'Decade of Commemoration'

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The Irish Civil War officially commenced shortly before dawn on June 28th, 1922 when the newly established Irish Provisional Government began shelling Dublin's Four Courts, in occupation by a section of the anti-treaty IRA since April. After two days of heavy fighting, the Four Courts garrison fell, but not before a massive explosion – culpability for which has been debated ever since¹ – rocked the Public Records Office inside the complex, obliterating a vast collection of historic records. As the early confrontations in the capital subsided and fighting moved to the south and west of the country, charred fragments of Ireland's documented history wafted from the sky. It is fitting that the Irish Civil War began with so spectacular an assault on the country's historical memory – after all, what are official archives but repositories of state memory? – for one of the bitterest conflict's central legacies has been the challenges it poses for remembrance in a nationalist culture otherwise noted for its long historical memory and highly developed traditions of commemoration.² In contrast to the 1916 Easter Rising and sundry episodes in the War of Independence that have been publicly commemorated, celebrated, or popularly remembered in a more positive light, the 1922-23 descent into intra-nationalist fighting has been described as “almost universally regarded as best forgotten”.³ Participants in the war, their families, local communities, the Irish State, political parties, even historians, have contributed to what has been

- 1 Tom Garvin, *1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin, 2005 edn), p. 138. David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands 1912-1939* (Oxford: 1998), pp. 129, 170. John Regan, “The Singing Flame Rekindled: Ernie O'Malley and the Destruction of the Public Records Office”, paper delivered at The Ernie O'Malley Symposium on Modern Ireland and Revolution, Glucksman Ireland House, New York University, 25-26 April 2014. For further discussion of this issue, see John Regan's contribution to this journal.
- 2 Ian McBride, “Introduction: memory and national identity in modern Ireland” in McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2010 edn), pp. 1-42. A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: The Roots of Conflict in Ulster* (London and Boston: 1989 edn.), pp. 13-17 and 179-182. Oliver MacDonagh, *States of Mind: A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1780-1980* (London, 1983), pp. 1-14 passim.
- 3 Jack Lane in preface of Brendan Clifford, *The Irish Civil War: The Conflict that Formed the State: A Speech given to the Duhallow Heritage Center on 22nd April, 1992* (Cork, 1993), p. 2.

called a “conspiracy of silence” and “ominous wall of silence” around civil war memory.⁴ But while modern Irish society has thus far avoided a full reckoning with its most “difficult story to tell”,⁵ the conflict that ended the Irish Revolution and “formed the Irish state”⁶ proved too emotive and politically consequential to be consigned to historical oblivion. Indeed, the internal dynamics and patterns of Irish political and social life from the mid-1920s until, at the least, the 1960s are scarcely comprehensible without taking into consideration the country’s scarring experience of civil war.⁷

As is well known, civil war divisions became permanently inscribed in the political landscape of independent Ireland, functioning as the original *raison d’être* of the two dominant Irish parties in the south, while the constitutional issues raised by the treaty settlement and the political structures it codified remained the focus of much Irish political debate and activity until the late 1940s (or well beyond if the treaty’s role in reinforcing Partition is taken into account). Moreover, the intense animosities and allegiances generated in the polarizing ‘war of friends’ (Cogadh na nCarad in Irish) were not easily forgotten. The oft-referenced ‘ghosts of the civil war’ exercised a spectral influence on the aging revolutionary generation,⁸ while the treaty split lay behind many feuds and rifts that festered between (and/or within) political parties, veterans groups, communities, families, and individuals for many decades beyond the war.

The historical duality between the enduring legacies and lingering echoes of the conflict’s divisions on the one hand, and the widespread tendency to publicly repress and elide the period’s ugly memory on the other, constitute the central dialectic of civil war memory in nationalist Ireland.⁹ The unresolved tension between memory/remembrance and forgetting or silence has created many layers and cross-currents within public and private civil war memory in Ireland, contributing to the small-scale war’s disproportionately powerful and persistent afterlife. Nearly a century on, the conflict’s reverberations in Irish cultural life now warrant as much serious scrutiny as the events of 1922-23 themselves. The present moment is particularly apposite for focusing attention on the subjective and ever evolving memory of the civil war, alongside, of course, the episode’s more ‘objective’ history. For one, a global “memory boom” has been underway since the 1990s,¹⁰ as evidenced by the proliferation of books, articles, journals, conferences, university

4 T. Ryle Dwyer, *Tans, Terrors and Troubles: Kerry’s Real Fighting Story, 1913-1923* (Cork, 2000), p. 11. Dorothy Macardle, *Tragedies of Kerry, 1922-1923* (Dublin, 1988 edn), p. 4.

5 Seán Moylan, Bureau of Military History, WS 838, p. 277, at <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0838.pdf>

6 Clifford, *The Irish Civil War: The Conflict that Formed the State*.

7 Eoin Neeson, *The Civil War in Ireland 1922-23* (Swords, Co. Dublin, 1989 edn), p. 32. Joe Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 68.

8 See “The Ghost of the Civil War”, a 1962 Dublin Opinion cartoon reprinted in Helen Litton, *The Irish Civil War: An Illustrated History* (Dublin, 1995), p. 136.

9 Anne Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: History and Memory 1923-2000* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 5.

10 Jay Winter, “The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies”, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 27 (2000): 69-92. Guy Beiner, “In Anticipation of a Post-Memory Boom Syndrome”, *Cultural Analysis*, 7 (2008): 107-112.

courses, museum exhibits and other endeavours devoted to exploring the social practices of remembering and the fertile yet tense relationship between history and its memory in the present. Although we tend to think of memory and the act of remembering as psychological or mental processes that occur within individuals, the interdisciplinary field of memory studies treats memory as, fundamentally, a social phenomenon – hence adjectives like ‘collective’, ‘cultural’, ‘social’ and ‘popular’ attached to the term – that inevitably evolves, changes, and gets selectively preserved according to our present needs and interests.¹¹

The fact that the recently begun revolutionary centenary has been called the ‘decade of commemoration(s)’ foregrounds the importance of memory and remembrance for public discourse about this seminal period of Irish history,¹² though who or what deserves to be commemorated seems to be a major point of contention. This can be seen from the recent rhetorical row initiated by John Bruton’s counter-factual preference for the “irreversibility” (sic) of Home Rule over the “unnecessary” Easter Rising,¹³ as well as from public frustration with the government’s plans for commemorating 1916 which were tardily announced in a slick video that one prominent historian advising the government nonetheless dismissed as “embarrassing unhistorical shit”!¹⁴ Debate over whom or what deserves to be memorialized, how, and by whom will no doubt gather intensity as we reach the unpleasant milestones of the especially sensitive civil war period. Why the Irish Civil War is associated with so fraught a cultural memory is the central concern of this essay. Since it is scarcely possible for a single essay to explore adequately the many accretions of memory (and silence) that have formed around this traumatic event over the course of a century, the discussion that follows will focus more narrowly on the tension between memory and forgetting – in both public and private contexts – that forms the crux of civil memory in Ireland.

“Ireland’s greatest tragedy”: contextualizing civil war memory

Any proper discussion of Irish civil war memory must begin with an acknowledgement of the heavy emotional and psychological toll the war took on the generation who lived through it. Even when otherwise avoiding the post-1921 split in Sinn

11 Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison, 2007), pp. 23-9. McBride, “Introduction” in McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, pp. 5-7.

12 For examples, see <http://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/>; http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/News/Archives/2012/Government_Press_Releases_2012/National_Commemorations_Programme_Decade_of_Centenaries_2012-2022.html; and <http://www.tcd.ie/decade-commemoration/>

13 John Bruton, ‘Why the Irish State should formally commemorate the centenary on 18 September of the enactment into law of Home Rule’ (7 August 2014 post) and ‘Remember 18 September 1914’ (3 August 2014 post), both at http://www.johnbruton.com/2014_08_01_archive.html. See also ‘Former Taoiseach John Bruton says Easter Rising ‘unnecessary’’, *Irish Times*, 4 August 2014, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/former-taoiseach-says-easter-rising-unnecessary-1.1886582>.

14 Diarmaid Ferriter quoted in ‘Profile: John Concannon, Mr 1916’, *Irish Times*, 15 November 2014, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/profile-john-concannon-mr-1916-1.2001432>

Féin in their memoirs and recorded recollections, many revolutionary veterans have laid stress on the intensely traumatic impact the conflict had on themselves and their contemporaries, a fact that helps us to understand the deep silences and highly selective memories that would come to frame the episode. Liam Deasy described the civil war as “Ireland’s greatest tragedy” when “the country had sunken to the lowest depths in its long history.”¹⁵ Another prominent activist remembered it as “the saddest and most trying time in my life,”¹⁶ while other participants have offered melancholy assessments of the period as one of “unbelievable discord and tragedy”,¹⁷ and as a collective “story of failure and disruption...bitterness and antagonism.”¹⁸ A sure sign that we are in the realm of social memory, such sentiments have often been expressed in recurrent, almost formulaic, language. Thus, different sources describe the legacy of the civil war as a “psychological wound” left “largely unhealed” for decades,¹⁹ a “scar...on Ireland’s soul,”²⁰ and a “festering wound [that] has ever since plagued the nation.”²¹ Academic historians as diverse as Ronan Fanning, Michael Hopkinson, and Joe Lee have concurred with popular assessments of the war’s devastating psychological fallout, writing respectively of the “disfigur[ing]” “scars” on “the Irish body politic”²², the “permanent” damage done to the “national psyche”,²³ and the episode’s “poisonous...legacy”.²⁴ Even Roy Foster, who generally casts a cold eye on populist and nationalist readings of Irish history, has nonetheless dramatically proclaimed the civil war a “caesura across Irish history” of even greater significance than the Anglo-Irish War itself.²⁵

Perhaps no historian has conveyed the conflict’s freighted legacy as powerfully as did F.S.L. Lyons in the first edition of his epic study, *Ireland since the Famine* (1971):

It was an episode which has burned so deep into the heart and mind of Ireland that it is not yet possible for the historian to approach it with the detailed knowledge or the objectivity which it deserves and sooner or later must have. So many of the divisions and hatreds that were to scar the political and social life of Ireland for the next two decades - and are visible even to-day - stem from those months of internecine warfare that charity and

15 Liam Deasy, *Brother Against Brother* (Dublin, 1998), p. 125.

16 Robert Briscoe (with Alden Hatch), *For the Life of Me* (Boston, 1958), p. 334.

17 Frank Robbins, *Under the Starry Plough: Recollections of the Irish Citizens Army* (Dublin, 1977), p. 237.

18 Moylan, BMH WS 838, p. 278.

19 C.S. Andrews, *Dublin Made Me* (Dublin, 2001 edn.), p. 328.

20 *The Story of the Drumboe Martyrs* (Letterkenny, 1958?), pp. 7-8.

21 Jeremiah Murphy, *When Youth was mine: A Memoir of Kerry, 1902-1925* (Dublin, 1998), p. 202.

22 Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1983), p. 1.

23 Michael Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 2004 edn), p. 274.

24 Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p. 68.

25 R.F. Foster. *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London, 1988), p. 511.

the interests of truth alike demand a certain reticence about events which are still felt so profoundly and yet so little understood in their inner meaning.²⁶

This is a remarkably emotive, almost mystical, verdict for an academic historian, particularly one associated with the early Irish revisionist school known, among other things, for its commitment to ‘value-free’, empirical methods uncontaminated by nationalist sentiment or popular ‘myths’.²⁷ Lyons is particularly insightful here on the paradoxical duality of civil war memory, that is the way he captures the collective code of silence erected around the period alongside unextinguished hatreds (and therefore, memories) burning below the surface. His underlying endorsement of a “certain reticence” about the conflict is equally noteworthy. Indeed, is it not incredible that, nearly fifty years after the civil war – when library shelves were already filled with books on more recent, yet no less controversial, historical subjects such as the events of the Second World War – a professional historian was still advising against research into so critical a moment in modern Irish history? And yet, Lyons’ cautionary tone is understandable, and hardly exceptional. At the time, the civil war had only been the subject of a few popular histories,²⁸ while most critical archives from the period were not yet open, and the debates and controversies of the war remained touchy subjects with veterans and their contemporaries, some of whom were still active in public life.

It needs to be said that so freighted a legacy has little to do with the objective scale of the conflict. After all, the toll of 1922-23 fighting – producing possibly as few as 1,500-2,000 deaths, despite much higher estimates long in circulation²⁹ – recedes into insignificance next to the roughly 30,000 lives lost in the 1798 Rising, or the estimated 1.5 million dead of the Great Famine. But whereas a nationalist reading of history can accommodate and even redeem these other past defeats and tragedies, a conflict pitting ‘brother against brother’ constitutes a form of “unnatural strife”³⁰ because it inherently undermines core nationalist conceptions of history, communal identity, and memory. After all, Irishmen killing one another over competing conceptions of the national ideal (among other less elevated differences) does not fit comfortably into a national narrative predicated on Anglo-Irish

26 F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (New York, 1971 edition). p. 460.

27 See Roy Foster’s entry on Lyons in the online *Dictionary of Irish Biography* at <http://dib.cambridge.org/> For various perspectives on the methodological assumptions and stylistic tendencies of the early Irish revisionist school see Ciaran Brady (ed.), *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate over Historical Revisionism 1938–1994* (Dublin, 1994), passim.

28 The most notable of these were Neeson, *The Civil War in Ireland 1922-23* (1966) and Calton Younger, *Ireland’s Civil War* (New York, 1969).

29 For example, Lyons estimated 4,000 dead, *Ireland since the Famine* (1973 edn), footnote on pp. 467-8. For other figures see Hopkinson, *Green against Green*, pp. 272-3. Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War*, p. 1. John Dorney, ‘Casualties of the Irish Civil War in Dublin’, 2012 post on The Irish Story website at <<http://www.theirishstory.com/2012/06/19/casualties-of-the-irish-civil-war-in-dublin/>>.

30 “Manifesto from the Convention of Irish Women Workers, held on Sunday, October 15th, 1922”, quoted in R.M. Fox, *Louie Bennett: Her Life and Times* (Dublin, 1957?), pp. 79-80.

conflict, while cherished notions of communal solidarity in any country are, by definition, unsustainable amidst civil war.³¹

Arguments for the uniquely traumatic character of civil wars, as opposed to wars fought against foreigners, have been around for a long time. The author of an early history of the Battle of Culloden observed, “Of all the miseries of war, those attendant on a civil war are the most dreadful...laws are silent, justice is banished, violence unrestrained, and an hereditary enmity established amongst the survivors...”³² Speaking at the first Ard-Fheis of Fianna Fáil in 1926, de Valera echoed this view of civil war, noting that whereas “war against an outsider often tends to unite, civil war almost invariably tends to disintegrate a community.”³³ In the parlance of memory studies, civil wars result in fractured and divisive memories which resist the process of “remembering in common” that is crucial for solidifying national identity and helping societies collectively make sense of traumatic episodes.³⁴ The result in Ireland is that the civil war acquired a quasi-taboo mystique, becoming an “unspeakable war” as journalist Eoin Neeson dubbed it for a series of articles in the late 1950s³⁵ a few years before the subject began to be addressed in popular histories for the post-civil war generation. Thus, in the long wake produced by the war, apart from occasional flashes of old civil war bitterness and recriminations in political speeches and exchanges in the Dáil,³⁶ or the predictable election-time “use and abuse” of civil war politics by both the Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil parties,³⁷ many civil war figures in the public eye regarded it as being “in the interest of the national good”³⁸ to “bury the dead past of [civil war] dissensions” beneath the more uplifting story of the “four glorious years”.³⁹

There is little doubt that excessive attention to the polarizing memory of the treaty conflict by the post-revolutionary political establishment (or, indeed, by groups and people throughout Irish society) would not have been conducive to political stability, social cohesion, communal harmony, or even familial bonds in the first generation of independence. Moreover, in the ensuing decades, new controversies and developments in Irish politics interacted and overlapped with old civil war dynamics, creating additional motives and reasons for public discretion

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- 31 Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War*, p. 3. However, Dolan argues that anti-treaty memory is “a simpler thing” more easily accommodated by nationalist tradition than the Free State’s “more troubled experience of remembering”.
- 32 *The History of the rise, progress, and extinction of the Rebellion in Scotland in the years 1745 and 1746* (London, 1755?), p. 3.
- 33 Maurice Moynihan (ed.), *Speeches and Statements by Eamon De Valera, 1917-73* (Dublin, 1980), pp. 144-5.
- 34 Robert Gildea quoted in Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War*, p. 3.
- 35 Neeson’s series ran in the *Sunday Review* September 1958-January 1959.
- 36 Noel Browne, *Against the Tide* (Dublin, 1991), p. 228.
- 37 Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War*, p. 5. See also Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p. 68 and Browne, *Against the Tide*, pp. 228-9.
- 38 Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p. 68.
- 39 Tom Barry speech at the 1965 unveiling of the Michael Collins memorial in Clonakilty, quoted in K. Griffith and T. O’Grady, *Ireland’s Unfinished Revolution: An Oral History* (Niwot, Colorado, 1999 edn), p. 336. David Hogan (pseudonym for Frank Gallagher), *The Four Glorious Years, 1918-1921* (Dublin, 1953).

about the state's messy revolutionary origins. For example, though the southern state's isolating experience during the 'Emergency' years is often cited as a "healing" moment during which former civil war enemies worked together in defence of the state's neutrality,⁴⁰ the same period saw the de Valera government counter the IRA in ways that were awkwardly reminiscent of the Cosgrave government's actions during and immediately after the civil war. Aside from the republican movement's noisy condemnations of de Valera's 'counter-revolutionary' progression in office, neither of these developments in the 1940s was conducive to mainstream Irish nationalism publicly dwelling on the divisive civil war period. The celebratory atmosphere surrounding the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966, while briefly indicating the state's belated embrace of its revolutionary heritage, was rapidly eclipsed by renewed unrest in the North. As John Regan has recently argued about the practice of history in post-1968 Ireland,⁴¹ but a point that can also be extended to manifestations of public memory beyond historiography, the Northern 'Troubles' raised serious presentist concerns for southern Ireland's political, academic, literary, and media classes regarding the 1913-23 revolution that provided the ideals, moral justifications, and 'unfinished business' driving a new generation of IRA Volunteers. The post-civil war generation's ethic of letting the sleeping dogs of the civil war lie was therefore not simply a gesture of respect for lingering civil war sensitivities or the aged product of some other, deeply entrenched civil war-era dynamic. It was also a response to more immediate political and social conditions, which highlights the crucial point in memory studies that a society's collective historical memory is a creative and evolving negotiation with the past that happens in, and very much serves the needs of, the present.

'Monumental memory': public remembering and forgetting of the civil war

Monuments, memorials, and other public commemorations are among the most obvious manifestations of collective memory that, by virtue of their tangibility, public character, (often) official sponsorship, and accessibility to historical study, have attracted the most attention in memory studies. Many moments in Irish history have generated a significant amount of 'monumental memory',⁴² from well-known statues of 'great men' like Wolfe Tone, O'Connell, Parnell, Davis, and Larkin in the streets and parks of Dublin; to an efflorescence of pikemen and assorted memorials erected for the 1798 Rising's centenary and bicentenary anniversaries; to the Great Famine's belated sesquicentennial commemorative wave; to the 1916 Easter Rising's numerous lieux de mémoire (or 'sites of memory')⁴³,

40 Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present* (Cornell, 1985 edn), p. 137. Ronan McGreevy, 'Fitzgerald recalls Civil War healing', *Irish Times*, 13 November, 2008.

41 John Regan, "Southern Irish Nationalism as a Historical Problem", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 50:01 (March 2007): 197-223.

42 I adapt this phrase from Nietzsche's concept of "monumental history" as discussed by Joep Leersen, "Monument and trauma: varieties of remembrance" in McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, pp. 204-222.

43 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989): 7-24.

including the GPO itself and plaques, memorials, and statues galore across the country. In contrast, the civil war has not produced a comparable commemorative output commensurate with its historical significance. Indeed, the early Free State's failure to commemorate or publicly honour its leaders, fallen soldiers, or civil war origins in any whole-hearted or sustained fashion has been called a "chronicle of embarrassment" by one prominent historian.⁴⁴ In her pioneering study of the early Irish state's relationship to the civil war's memory, Anne Dolan locates the early Free State's reluctance to commemorate its own war dead in the deep ambivalences that accompany military victory in a nationalist civil war, particularly a victory secured in cooperation with the departing colonial power. Whereas the fight against the Free State was easily enough folded into an established nationalist narrative of a centuries-long struggle for national freedom – albeit this time waged against so-called "recreant Irishmen" – the pro-treaty camp's defence of an ambiguous political compromise runs against the grain of nationalist teleology, resulting in deeper public silences and little active commemoration outside of graveyards and the National Army plot in Glasnevin Cemetery.⁴⁵ [See Figure 1 for a rare exception to the rule.] Steeped in a nationalist culture predicated on a "redemptive" mode of memory that celebrates individual martyrs, heroic suffering, and righteous, sacrificial defeats for a just, age-old cause,⁴⁶ republicans seized on the 'memory stakes' of the civil war by taunting their erstwhile comrades with questions like, "If you are killed fighting to destroy the Republic...will your name be remembered for ever?" Another republican handbill provided the answer to such questions: "Your name and cause will fade like last year's snow...For you...FORGETFULNESS. For me, a Fenian's grave and remembrance for ever..."⁴⁷

As this rhetoric suggests, republicans came out of the conflict with a more assured relationship to the memory politics of the civil war, adopting commemoration as a form of political protest that claimed a moral victory on the very landscape where republicanism experienced its stinging military defeat. Countless small markers and monuments to the local reverberations of the conflict dot the Irish landscape, attesting to the robustness of militant republicanism's refusal to accommodate the more popular urge to 'forget' the civil war. The classic expressions of this recalcitrant tradition of republican memory are the small wooden roadside crosses to republican victims of Free State killings that Dorothy Macardle wrote about reverentially in her oft-reprinted 1924 booklet, *Tragedies of Kerry*. In many cases both in Kerry and beyond, these spontaneous manifestations of civil war remembrance became permanent stone plaques and markers, among them the Celtic cross erected to the memory of Noel Lemass in the Wicklow Mountains and

44 David Fitzpatrick, "Commemoration in the Irish Free State: a chronicle of embarrassment", in McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, pp. 184-203. See also Declan Kiberd, "The Elephant of Revolutionary Forgetfulness" (1991), reprinted in Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 191-207.

45 Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War*, passim.

46 McBride, "Introduction" in McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, pp. 16, 27, 34-36.

47 "If you are killed", *The Nation*, 19 August 1922. "Open letter from Padraig O Brian of the 'Irregular' Forces to his former Friend and Comrade, Pat O'Brien of the 'National' Army", P17a/245, Ernie O'Malley Papers, UCD Archives.

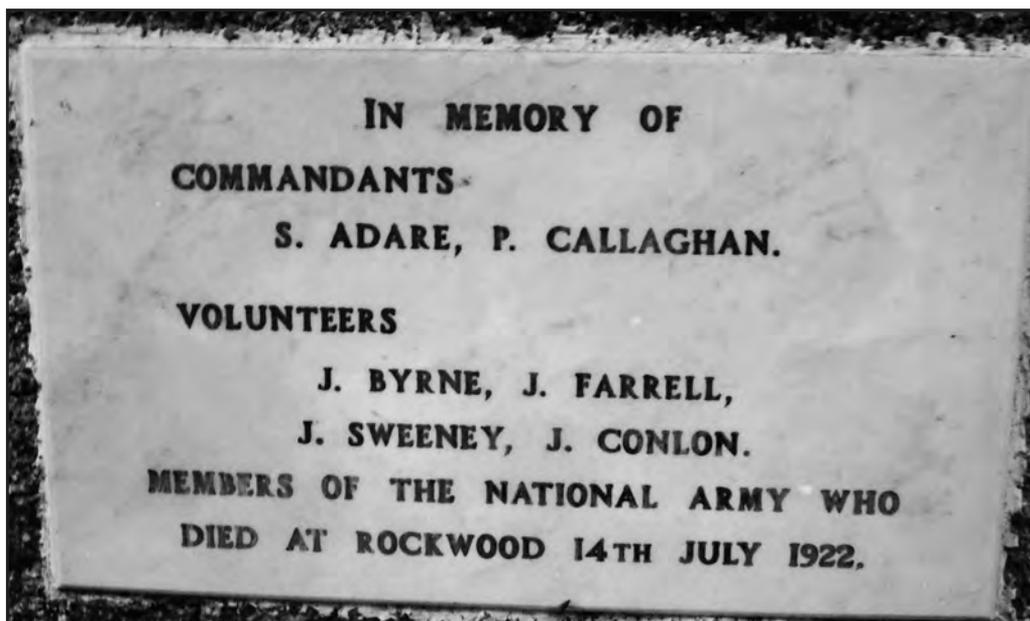


Figure 1: A rare public memorial to pro-treaty soldiers killed in action: this simple plaque in Sligo remembers the death of troops in a republican ambush in July 1922

memorials at Countess Bridge in Killarney and Clashmealcon caves near Causeway in County Kerry, among many others. In fact, at the latter location there is almost an excess of civil war memory that challenges arguments for its alleged ‘absence’. Near the cliff’s edge, where a small column of anti-treaty fighters sheltered in a coastal cave during a deadly siege against a superior force of Free State troops, there now stand two separate memorials – one claimed by Sinn Féin, and one tended by a Fianna Fáil cumann – following a Christmas storm several years ago that damaged the original single monument.⁴⁸ [See Figures 2 and 3.] Additionally, there is a small wooden cross on the cliff’s edge and a plaque on a nearby farm building, while the names of the siege’s victims are also inscribed on several other memorials elsewhere in North Kerry. Unveiled in 1959, the massive roadside memorial to the Ballyseedy massacre on the road outside Tralee surely stands as the most impressive example of republicanism’s monumental memory of the civil war. Sculptor Yann Renard-Goulet’s large, bronze tableau depicting an emaciated man lying at the feet of a grieving woman and child alongside a standing man striking a defiant pose suggests an implicit historical parallel between the suffering of the Great Hunger and republicanism’s bitter defeat in the civil war, both tragedies redeemed in some sense by an invincible national spirit. [See Figure 4.] Beyond Kerry, republican plots and scattered monuments in Cork, Limerick, Carlow,

48 From a conversation with Kerry civil war authority, Tim Horgan. I would like to thank Tim for sharing his expertise with me and for taking me to Clashmealcon Caves (among other places).



Figure 2, left: One of two separate memorials to republican fighters killed during (or executed after) the April 1923 siege at Clashmealcon caves in North Kerry. Figure 3, right: A short distance away stands this second, older monument to anti-treaty Volunteers killed in the Clashmealcon caves siege.

Dublin, Wexford, Galway, Donegal, and elsewhere, also memorialize the deaths, ambushes, and executions of 1922-23, functioning in the present as important sites of mourning, remembrance, and pilgrimage claimed and tended by families and local groups or by Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, or occasionally both, in the service of their respective political traditions.

With their commitment to preserving the memory of only one side in the conflict – an example of “remembering at” or against the political other⁴⁹ – such memorials point to a partisan (and highly localized) tradition of memory as opposed to a shared national memory that transcends the divisions of the period the way that the American Civil War, for example, is widely understood as a tragic but necessary moment in U.S. history worthy of official commemorations of the dead on both sides. Just as importantly, most of these small republican memorials have come out of grassroots, local efforts rather than state-sanctioned or government-sponsored attempts at preserving or creating a shared or ‘collective’ memory. Republican commemorationism thus underscores the fissiparous nature of civil war memory in Ireland, a memory inflected by political, geographic, and other lines of fracture that defy notions of a singular public memory of the event, while they also challenge bifurcated models of monolithic anti- and pro-treaty memory traditions.

But notwithstanding evidence of the republican movement’s commitment to

49 Edna Longley, “Northern Ireland: commemoration, elegy, forgetting” in McBride (ed) *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, p. 231.



Figure 4: The massive republican monument at Ballyseedy Cross just outside Tralee. Unveiled in 1959, the memorial commemorates perhaps the most infamous atrocity in the civil war: the Free State Army's March 6th, 1923 reprisal killing of eight republican prisoners by detonating a mined barricade to which they were tied. The memorial also serves to honour the other fallen soldiers of the Kerry IRA's First Brigade.

commemorating its civil war experience, even within republican memory there are silences and ambivalences concerning a period that, after all, was associated with defeat, disaster, and demoralization for the anti-treaty cause. Republican exhortations to remember 'Rory, Liam, Dick, and Joe' and other fallen comrades often betray a fear that remembrance would prove too burdensome or unpopular a task for a nation weary of revolution and war. Republican memory of the '77' men executed by the Free State, for example, actually overlooks at least four Volunteers executed in the same period, while most lists of republicans 'murdered in custody' or killed in questionable circumstances fail to tally the number of victims consistently or comprehensively, and there has yet to be a full accounting of the total number of anti-treaty casualties. Moreover, the cryptic inscriptions on some republican memorials often conceal more than they reveal about the identities, motives, and memories of the commemorators themselves. For example, the Celtic cross memorializing Noel Lemass tells us only that it was "erected by a few friends", while an Ennis monument to three young Claremen executed at the end of the civil war includes an inscription that is as circumspect as it is defiant: "erected by their Ennis exiled comrades of New York City U.S.A. 1st Nov. 1928." The advent of Fianna Fáil and its rapid ascent to power in the early 1930s produced new fractures, silences, and ambivalences in anti-treaty civil war memory. The internment and executions of IRA members by the de Valera government added new

names to the republican honour roll, such as hanging victim Charlie Kerins who, to some extent, supplanted or overlaid the civil war's dead, further complicating the meaning of the earlier conflict when de Valera and many within his cabinet were on the republican side angrily denouncing state executions.

State (and anti-state) Memory: The Bureau of Military History and O'Malley's Notebooks

While, as George Steiner has written, "silence knows no history,"⁵⁰ there is no shortage of fragmentary evidence that hints at the extent to which the events of the civil war were subsequently repressed, elided, or otherwise written out of official state memory. The early Cosgrave administration's destruction of large caches of sensitive civil war files on the eve of Fianna Fáil's coming to power in 1932 is the most literal manifestation of this official will to forget.⁵¹ Ironically, there is perhaps no better example of the Irish state's efforts to disown the memory of the civil war than its own Bureau of Military History project, an official Department of Defence collection of nearly 2,000 personal accounts solicited in the late 1940s and early 1950s from Sinn Féin activists and other contemporary witnesses to the post-1913 struggle for independence. While a most commendable initiative that has inestimably enhanced scholarly and public understanding of the period since its contents became fully accessible to researchers in 2003 (and subsequently went online in 2012), the project architects' early decision to exclude the messy 1922-23 period of intra-nationalist conflict from the BMH's remit constitutes a profound historical silence at the center of the state's constructed memory of its own origins. Apart from non-cooperation by some republicans and others who suspected a partisan political agenda behind the project, the BMH was, from its inception, a thoroughly bipartisan affair, which is to say that parties and actors on both sides of the treaty split were equally complicit in writing the civil war out of the revolutionary story. Indeed, despite all of their other differences and disagreements about the project since it was first mooted in the 1930s, all of the parties involved in the development of the BMH appear to have been in tacit agreement on one fundamental point: the narrative accounts collected from revolutionary witnesses should only go as far as the Anglo-Irish Truce of July 1921, leaving the post-1921 breakup of movement solidarity safely outside the institutionalized history of the independence struggle.⁵²

Of course, not all of the statements collected respected the historical periodization officially imposed on the project; hundreds of participants mention the civil war at least in passing while a smaller number address the treaty conflict at

50 George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York, 1975), p. 29.

51 Neeson, *The Civil War in Ireland*, pp. 38, 279 footnote 6. Nollaig Ó Gadhra, *Civil War in Connacht 1922-1923* (Cork, 1999), p. 53. A Department of Defence memorandum from 7 March 1932 ordered the destruction "by fire" of all Intelligence Reports, proceedings of Military Courts, and all documents pertaining to civil war executions, P91/86(20), Todd Andrews Papers, UCDA.

52 Diarmaid Ferriter, "In such deadly earnest: The Bureau of Military History," *Dublin Review*, No. 12 (Autumn 2003): 36-65.

considerable length. And, at a more subtle level, the process of remembering is such that one inevitably looks back on the past through the accumulated experiences of intervening years. Even where BMH witnesses assiduously avoid discussing the civil war then, the allegiances and animosities of the treaty split cannot but have tinted their opinions and views on events and people discussed in earlier contexts. Thus the ghosts of the civil war came to haunt the BMH archive, rendering it a potentially hazardous site of national memory for many years after its completion. Questions and sensitivities around nationalist legitimacy, political ownership of the revolution's legacy, and who or what made the biggest contributions to the national cause – all issues that had also been at the core of civil war debates – were necessarily begged by the competing accounts and memories preserved within the BMH, further raising the stakes of the project. Fearing that the history of the revolutionary struggle passed down to posterity would be distorted by witnesses of questionable motives and dubious revolutionary credentials, Tom Barry notoriously averred that the entire collection ought to be set ablaze in, of all places, Dublin's Garden of Remembrance.⁵³ Rather less dramatically, the government decided to impose a quarantine period of twenty-five years on the archive before the narratives within could be released to the public. Continuing controversy over the archive's "historical half-life"⁵⁴ ultimately delayed the BMH's public debut from the early 1980s until 2003.

While historians might bemoan the absence of many potentially valuable insider accounts of the civil war due to the BMH's selective periodization of the revolution, many who provided witness statements (and perhaps many more who declined to cooperate altogether) implicitly agreed with the policy of avoiding the civil war. The officer presiding over General Seán MacEoin's epic statement (totaling over 200 pages, plus 10 appendices) noted that MacEoin, who played a critical role in the civil war commanding the Free State Army's Western Command based in Athlone, "appeared to be most careful to avoid inclusion...of any reference to political and other controversies which arose in later years."⁵⁵ Celebrated as the 'Blacksmith of Ballinalee' for heroically leading the Longford IRA's flying column in the Tan War, MacEoin's more controversial activities in the civil war complicate his legacy and help to explain his careful avoidance of later events. Even those like anti-treatyite and later Fianna Fáil Minister Seán Moylan who believed that the tragic failures and divisions of the civil war held important historical lessons,⁵⁶ nonetheless resisted engaging with the period in their BMH statements. In 1953 Moylan submitted a lengthy and highly detailed witness statement that seems to strain against, yet ultimately respects, the artificial temporal boundaries around the project. At the very end of his statement, after briefly lamenting the deaths of old friends on both sides of the civil war split in "those days of Ireland's

53 Meda Ryan, *Tom Barry: IRA Freedom Fighter* (Cork, 2003), p. 240.

54 Luke Gibbons, "Framing History: Neil Jordan's Michael Collins," *History Ireland*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 1997): 47.

55 From 13 December 1957 memorandum by Col. J.J. Conway introducing MacEoin's BMH statement, BMH WS 1716, <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1716pt2.pdf>

56 Moylan, BMH WS 838, p. 278.

Gethsemane”,⁵⁷ he pledges, “It shall be my endeavor at a future date to tell that story”. Sadly though, he died a few years later without having fully shared that most “difficult story to tell.”⁵⁸ Moylan’s testimony to the BMH, however, gives us a glimpse of the painful internal struggle between memory and forgetting felt by many survivors of a conflict that, while written out of the collective story of the revolution constructed by the state, constitutes a stubborn presence by its very absence.

Respected revolutionary veteran Ernie O’Malley’s nearly contemporaneous, private effort to gather detailed accounts of local and regional IRA activity from (primarily anti-treaty) veterans provides a fascinating counterpoint to the government’s official archive. O’Malley’s methods and purpose differed in important ways from the BMH. Rather than soliciting written accounts from a wide cross-section of witnesses, he personally went around the country, in some instances nearly retracing his old steps as an IRA field organizer, to directly interview former comrades, often asking specific questions about particular military subjects he was most curious about. He recorded the answers by hand and then went back and revised, edited, and sometimes interpolated his interview notes with his own comments and corrections. In contrast to the larger BMH project, O’Malley’s collection of roughly 500 interviews reveals a disproportionate preoccupation with the searing experience of civil war, replete with explicit details of the abuse and murder of republican prisoners by the Free State Army. His field notebooks thus offer an implicitly anti-treaty critique of the state’s more sanitized revolutionary history, in effect functioning as a kind of ‘counter-archive’ that highlights the experiences of many men (and a handful of women) whose voices are not present in the BMH (though, a small number of witnesses cooperated with both O’Malley and the BMH).

The frank and detailed personal histories and memories O’Malley gleaned from his interviews in places like Kerry, Cork, and Mayo demonstrate that many veterans were, in fact, willing to talk about the civil war, albeit to a highly trusted fellow soldier whose writings promised to preserve the republican side’s experience, but whose raw interview notes would not become publicly accessible until most of the participants had passed away. O’Malley’s field notebooks, selections of which have recently begun to be professionally transcribed and published in a series of annotated volumes organized by region,⁵⁹ constitute a critical source against which the BMH must be read. With the government’s recent digitization and release of the first tranches of army and revolutionary service pension files detailing the activities of thousands of revolutionary veterans,⁶⁰ the number of

57 Moylan, BMH WS 838, pp. 277-8.

58 Moylan, BMH WS 838, p. 277.

59 The volumes published thus far by Mercier Press are Ernie O’Malley (with Cormac K. H. O’Malley and Tim Horgan, eds), *The men will talk to me: Kerry interviews* (Cork, 2012); E. O’Malley (with C. K. H. O’Malley and Cormac Ó Comhraí, eds), *The men will talk to me: Galway interviews* (Cork, 2013); and O’Malley (C. K. H. O’Malley and Vincent Keane, eds.) *The men will talk to me: Mayo interviews* (Cork, 2014).

60 <http://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/military-service-pensions-collection>

counter-narratives and cross-currents to the state's official archive has increased exponentially. Future research in such sources will further complicate and undermine the BMH collection's untenable goal of weaving together a collective history of the revolution that omits the very conflict that brought it to a close.

The Private/Public Memory Nexus: Memoirs and Personal Papers

The popular literary genre of IRA veterans' memoirs and other first-person revolutionary accounts represents an equally public site of revolutionary memory, though one that is less 'official' and much more individual than 'collective' in character compared to the memorials and archives explored above. Nonetheless, the selective memories, pregnant silences, and animosities of the civil war are also deeply inscribed upon these texts. As if in response to a collectively agreed upon stage cue, in countless memoirs and written narratives by IRA veterans a "curtain of forgetfulness"⁶¹ falls at the Anglo-Irish Truce of July 1921, thereby writing out of such narratives the moment when the independence movement's sense of solidarity and momentum gave way to division and chaos. For example, *Where Mountainy Men Have Sown*, Micheal O'Suilleabhain's account of 'rebel Cork' dispatches with the mid-1921 to late 1923 period in a single anecdote about a comrade who foretold "the coming of the Truce, the return of the politician and a civil war."⁶² Tom Barry's *Guerilla Days in Ireland* merely alludes to the treaty conflict (in which he was very active on the anti-treaty side) in its final sentence which sums up the truce as the "end of a phase, but, alas, not the end of our guerilla days."⁶³ Accounts by other revolutionary participants as diverse as republican propagandist Robert Brennan, pro-treaty TD and constitutional consultant Darrell Figgis, Dublin Brigade gunman Charles Dalton, and Clare IRA leader Michael Brennan, all similarly end abruptly before the civil war.

There are, of course, a number of well-known memoirs that run counter to this trend. Dan Breen's *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (first published in 1924, then revised and reissued in the 1960s) encompasses the entire 1916–1923 period, though this heavily ghost-written book provides only "meager details" on the civil war.⁶⁴ Peadar O'Donnell's 1932 prison memoir, *The Gates Flew Open*, stands as one of the earliest published accounts of the civil war, yet, in old age, O'Donnell decided not to donate his historically valuable personal papers to an archive because he had "no desire to start the Civil War all over again".⁶⁵ The most comprehensive published recollections of the oft-neglected civil war are arguably *The Singing Flame* (1978), the second volume of Ernie O'Malley's revolutionary mem-

61 J. Anthony Gaughan (ed.), *Memoirs of Sen. Joseph Connolly (1885-1961): A Founder of Modern Ireland* (Naas, 1996), p. 222.

62 Michael O'Suilleabhain, *Where Mountainy Men Have Sown: War and Peace in rebel Cork in the turbulent years 1916-21* (Tralee, 1965), p. 170.

63 Tom Barry, *Guerilla Days in Ireland: A Personal Account of the Anglo-Irish War* (Boulder, Colorado, 1995 edn; first published 1949), p. 228.

64 From editor's foreword in Dan Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (Tralee, 1975 edn), p. 9.

65 Gibbons, "Framing History" *History Ireland*, 47.

oirs, and *Brother against Brother* (1982), Liam Deasy's shorter follow up to his earlier 'Tan War' account, *Towards Ireland Free: The West Cork Brigade in the War of Independence 1917-1921* (1973). Crucially, however, both of these civil war volumes were unfinished or merely rough drafts when their authors died, and were only published posthumously after considerable revisions by editors.⁶⁶ (Apparently, in O'Malley's case, concerns over the potential for libel lawsuits was the primary reason he never went forward with the publication of his civil war account, a fact that highlights the volatility of civil war memory for decades after the conflict).⁶⁷ This pattern of posthumous publication applies to a number of other participant accounts and memoirs that cover the civil war.⁶⁸ In the case of the Irish Civil War then, dead men might actually tell more tales than the living.

In discussing the legacies of the civil war (or, for that matter, any traumatic event in a community's or nation's history), we must be sensitive to the differences and dissonances that can exist between, on the one hand, collective memory and acts of remembrance performed publicly, and on the other, individual memory cultivated (or repressed) in private. In particular, we shouldn't assume that 'official' silences in the public sphere necessarily imply forgetting, an absence of memory, or emotional detachment in the more intimate contexts of personal, family, or micro-communal memory. Nor should we expect that those aspects of the past that an individual chooses to dwell on or selectively remember in public neatly correspond to the memories and meanings he or she ponders over privately and/or circumspcctly discloses to close friends and confidantes. Indeed, with the civil war, it could be argued that a paradoxical combination of public silence (or a carefully crafted and highly selective engagement with past controversies) and private pre-occupation with the period was a common dynamic among veterans, particularly in their later years when so-called 'civil war politics' no longer dominated public discourse yet the rights and wrongs of the treaty split and their significance for individuals' historical reputations and consciences took on renewed urgency in old age. On opposite sides of the treaty split, Éamon de Valera and General Richard Mulcahy provide fascinating cases in point concerning the complex relationship between private and public memory of the civil war, though the fact that both were prominent and quite polarizing figures who lived long lives during which they cultivated an unusually obsessive interest in the history of the revolution, makes them somewhat atypical examples to be sure.

As is well known, neither de Valera nor Mulcahy ever published official memoirs detailing the pivotal and controversial roles they played in the civil war, nor did either appear to leave behind a formal BMH statement that can be accessed by researchers. Yet, far more so than their contemporaries who did choose to publish memoirs and compose lengthy accounts for the BMH, both de Valera and Mulcahy devoted much of their subsequent lives to defending, influencing, policing, and attempting to dictate the historical verdict on their respective roles in the

66 Editor's Introduction in O'Malley, *The Singing Flame* (Dublin, 1978), p. 8. Biographical Note in Deasy, *Brother against Brother*, p. 9.

67 From a conversation with Cormac O'Malley.

68 For example, John Pinkman (Francis E. Maguire, ed.), *In the Legion of the Vanguard* (Boulder, Co., 1998) and Murphy, *When Youth was Mine* (fully cited above).

revolution. Indeed, as Patrick Murray has thoroughly documented in an important article on the topic, de Valera was an “obsessive historian” who used nearly every venue available to him over the ensuing decades to rationalize and defend his past actions and positions, especially concerning the treaty split and civil war period and a few earlier controversies in the revolution that buttressed the pro-treaty case against him.⁶⁹ Highly public interventions on de Valera’s part in what Murray calls the “history wars of the post-Treaty period”⁷⁰ include a speech in 1936 in which he challenged Fine Gael leader William Cosgrave to cooperate in the setting up of a bipartisan ‘historical commission’ to settle definitively the question of who started the civil war,⁷¹ and, a decade later, his time on the stand as a witness in the ongoing Sinn Féin funds case, during which he insisted on putting into the trial record a lengthy yet largely irrelevant clarification of his position on the treaty oath.⁷²

Behind the scenes, de Valera was even more active in “policing his [political] reputation”, privately lecturing historians individually and in groups about particular points in his career, collecting and disseminating historical documents relating to his actions in 1916-23, and using friends and supporters to function as his apologists in letters to the press, public statements, and even whole histories which he closely edited or partially ghost wrote in the interests of his historical reputation.⁷³ For example, despite having already exercised a strong influence over the structure, content, and political slant of Dorothy Macardle’s 1937 history, *The Irish Republic*,⁷⁴ de Valera later contracted author T.P. O’Neill to write his suitably hagiographical official biography. Although going blind, de Valera personally pored over and reworked each chapter to such an extent that the publishers insisted on bringing in a new author to make the book more objective.⁷⁵ Yet, even in his tireless efforts to encourage and dictate the production of historical accounts that would vindicate him in the public eye both at the time and for posterity, civil war silences abound, from the partisan and therefore partial or incomplete version of the revolution he wished to have instituted (and the selective nature of the documents he gathered for this purpose), to his shadowy and silent influence over works ostensibly produced by outside parties. And while the posthumous opening of his personal papers at UCD’s archives revealed the full scope of his private preoccupation with the civil war period,⁷⁶ the purported “winnow[ing]” of some material from the collection by a family member before it was made accessible to

69 Patrick Murray, ‘Obsessive historian: Eamon de Valera and the policing of his reputation’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Section C, 101:2 (2001): 37-65.

70 Murray, ‘Obsessive historian: Eamon de Valera and the policing of his reputation’, p. 56.

71 *Irish Times*, 15 December 1949.

72 Murray, ‘Obsessive historian: Eamon de Valera and the policing of his reputation’, pp. 48-9.

73 Murray, ‘Obsessive historian: Eamon de Valera and the policing of his reputation’, passim.

74 Murray, ‘Obsessive historian: Eamon de Valera and the policing of his reputation’, pp. 58-61.

75 T.P. Coogan review of D. Ferriter, *Judging Dev: a reassessment of the life and legacy of Éamon de Valera* (Dublin, 2007), in *History Ireland*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (May/June 2008), available at <http://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/judging-dev-a-reassessment-of-the-life-and-legacy-of-eamon-de-valera/> The final product was Lord Longford and T.P. O’Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (Dublin, 1970).

76 See, for example, 22 August 1968 note on the civil war, P150/1678, De Valera Papers, UCDA.

researchers arguably introduced new, yet unknowable, silences in the historical record.⁷⁷

As Murray notes, General Richard Mulcahy also “laboured for decades to provide a painstakingly detailed account of events in which he had been involved.”⁷⁸ Like de Valera, Mulcahy’s private papers housed at UCD reflect the enormous time and energy he spent, particularly after his retirement from politics, writing up lengthy justifications for actions taken in 1922-23, cantankerously answering (or dismissing) historical questions about civil war issues, scrutinizing book reviews and newspaper retrospectives, privately rebutting writers and historians, and otherwise obsessing over the period.⁷⁹ Yet, at the same time, he could also be very cautious and circumspect about the period in public, rebuking enquiries and withholding or obscuring his views and recollections of the civil war and revolution on various occasions. For example, though Mulcahy’s name appears on the online index of BMH witnesses, there exists no corresponding written statement (or even a file number) that is publicly accessible online. (However, many of his Fine Gael colleagues did deposit statements now accessible to the public, including Cosgrave, Ernest Blythe, and Seán MacEoin.) When approached in the late 1950s by writer Eoin Neeson for a possible interview for a *Sunday Review* series on the civil war, Mulcahy brusquely declined the invitation, replying “I cannot appreciate at all the mixing up of the matters you propose to write about with the very important matters and problems of urgent current interest.” Re-contacted by Neeson after the series began running, Mulcahy was even more hostile in his refusal to contribute his views: “I find your approach to me in these circumstances embarrassing, and I cannot agree to be associated in any way with the work you have undertaken.”⁸⁰ In 1966 Mulcahy drafted a lengthy, negative response to a newspaper review of Neeson’s subsequent book, *The Civil War in Ireland 1922–23*, in which he also criticized the approach and content of Desmond Williams’ popular 1966 Thomas Davis Lecture Series on the 1916-era ‘Irish Struggle’.⁸¹ Around the same time, he spoke at a civil war history seminar jointly convened by Trinity College and UCD’s history societies, only to use the event as an opportunity to chide the organizers for dwelling on “imaginative” theories about the civil war when, in his opinion, they should be studying the successes of the War of Independence instead.⁸² Curiously, a few years later he was much more receptive to Calton Younger’s popular history, *Ireland’s Civil War (1968)*, going so far as to provide copious feedback on the text for the American paperback edition.⁸³

While perhaps exceptionally intense in their personal commitment to shap-

77 Coogan review of Ferriter, *Judging Dev, History Ireland*.

78 Murray, ‘Obsessive historian: Eamon de Valera and the policing of his reputation’, p. 38.

79 See, for example, clippings, correspondence, and notes in P7/D/34, P7/D/45, P7/D/51, P7/D/63-64, P7/D/84, and P7/D/90-93, Mulcahy Papers, UCDA. Also see Risteárd Mulcahy, Richard Mulcahy (1886–1971): A Family Memoir (Dublin, 1999).

80 Sept-Oct. 1958 correspondence between Mulcahy and Neeson, P7/D/90, Mulcahy Papers.

81 P7/D/91, Mulcahy Papers.

82 Irish Times, 22 November 1967. See also text of Mulcahy’s address in P7/D/64, Mulcahy Papers.

83 P7/D/93, Mulcahy Papers.

ing the historical narrative of the revolution, and notwithstanding their formal devotion to historical ‘accuracy’ (which, in practice, was often synonymous with their personal views and interests), de Valera and Mulcahy’s mutual preoccupation with civil war history was no mere intellectual exercise or hobby cultivated in old age. Rather, in both cases, it can be seen as a very personal struggle with the fraught memory of a traumatic period for which the passage of time brought little detachment or peace of mind, and which served the dual function of elaborating a detailed historical defense of past actions for use against legions of critics, while also influencing the construction of the collective memory or popular narrative of the revolution that would outlive the revolutionary generation. The fact that both men purportedly shunned each other socially for the rest of their lives, despite being colleagues in the Dáil and neighbors,⁸⁴ hints at the personal animosity, partisan rancor, and depth of emotion fueling their seemingly academic commitment to their shared revolutionary history. The shadow that such lingering civil war animosities and preoccupations must have cast over veterans’ families, including children and other members of the next generation, can also be seen as a form of civil war memory, albeit inherited rather than directly experienced, a phenomenon known as ‘postmemory’ which Marianne Hirsch defines as “the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experience of those who came before.”⁸⁵ With those who fought the civil war now gone, the memories, stories, and silences passed on to later generations represent a deep yet largely untapped reservoir of civil war memory that will further illuminate the meanings the conflict acquired in private, family, and local realms. This latter area is, in fact, the subject of my current research project which uses oral history interviews with the children and other descendants of civil war survivors to explore possible patterns and themes in later-generation memory of the conflict as expressed through family history and lore, personal stories, recollections, political views, local dynamics, and the like.

Conclusion

This essay began with the loss of the Four Courts’ historically priceless public records at the start of the civil war, a tragic assault on the country’s historical memory that symbolizes the legacies of silence, absence, fragmentation, and forgetting that would come to define Irish Civil War memory itself. Attention to these oft-noted silences in Ireland’s troubled memory of the civil war is crucial for understanding the conflict’s awkward place in the national psyche, as demonstrated here in the contexts of veterans’ memoirs, historiography, national and local commemorations, state archives like the BMH, and the personal memories of prominent civil war actors. However, this essay also argued that there is considerably more civil war memory in Ireland than is often recognized, albeit of a highly

84 Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985*, p. 69. See also Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War*, pp. 45, 201–2, and passim. Fanning, *Independent Ireland*, p. 8; John Horgan, *Seán Lemass: The Enigmatic Patriot* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1997), p. 49; Hopkinson, *Green against Green*, p. 274.

85 Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory”, *Poetics Today* 29:1 (Spring 2008): 106.

fragmentary and selective character in which memories exist in dialectical relation to the opposing urge to forget. The presence of civil war memory becomes more apparent when one looks beyond ‘official’ sites of memory like state archives and public commemorations to the less hegemonic realms of local, family, and private memory, as well as to the rich subject of forgetting itself. As Niall Ó Ciosáin and Guy Beiner have demonstrated in their work on the Great Famine and the 1798 Rising respectively, the memory of an event – and the silences around it – cannot simply be measured or assessed in terms of official memorials and monuments, nor by what gets selectively preserved in state archives or history books. Beneath this carapace of an abstract official memory lie deeper, more detailed layers of “vernacular” memory expressed through such things as folklore, popular culture, literature, material culture, local history, family stories, individual narratives, and even the landscape itself, all of which preserve, transmit, and give meaning to the past for later generations in ways that often challenge or complicate memory (and silence) at the national and global levels.⁸⁶ As explored in this essay, from the recalcitrant tradition of republican micro-commemoration in North Kerry, West Cork, and Dublin, to Ernie O’Malley’s notebooks, to the private musings of figures like de Valera and Mulcahy, we can catch glimpses of the durability of civil war memory and remembrance, as well as of the animosities, spirit of defiance, and even obsessiveness that animated them. Ultimately, it is only through careful examination of the manifold dualities of Irish Civil War memory – i.e. forgetting and remembering, collective and individual, public and private, official and vernacular, national and local, and pro- versus anti-treaty (along with sub-factions and competing interests within each tradition) – that we can begin to do justice to the complexity and richness of the seminal conflict’s legacies for modern Ireland.

Gavin Foster biography to come

86 Niall Ó Ciosáin, “Famine memory and the popular representation of scarcity” in McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, pp. 95-117. Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*, passim and pp. 208-230.