



Villar-Argáiz, Pilar (ed). *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 290 pp.i

The volume *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities* builds on Pilar Villar-Argáiz's continuing interest in exploring the tensions between centre and periphery, mainstream and marginal, in the context of contemporary Ireland. Villar-Argáiz proves to be particularly suitable for this task, as attested by her two previous edited collections: *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland: The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature* (Manchester UP, 2014) and "Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion: Artistic Renderings of Marginal Identities in Ireland" (the 2016 special issue of *Nordic Irish Studies* 15.1). Informed by recent developments in Irish society like the 2015 same-sex marriage referendum and the 2017 official recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority, Villar-Argáiz's volume examines "the way in which otherness is treated both socially and institutionally" (3), while also "rethinking nationhood and belonging by a process of denaturalisation of the supremacy of white heterosexual structures" (10). Comprehensive in its scope, the volume considers dissident voices on the bases of political affiliation, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, health and sexual orientation, displaying "sensitivity to minority grievances and demands" (3).

The first section of this study unearths historical manifestations of dissent, connecting them with contemporary views of society and culture. In particular, Jeannine Woods explores the subversion of binary constructions of gender and sexuality in Irish popular culture, revealing striking similarities between the drag performances in the context of the 2015 same-sex marriage referendum and the old wake rituals, prior to their suppression by the Catholic Church. The games performed in these wakes, Woods argues, "encompass shifts between genders, between the human and the animal, and between persons and objects with cultural and cosmological importance" (31). The second chapter, by John Keating, deals with the 1916 Easter Rising, whose cultural legacy is being debated and reassessed even today. Keating concentrates on Eimar O'Duffy's satirical voice in *The Wasted Island*, a novel where "the violence of the Rising is seen as fanatical, suicidal and unjust" (50). According to Keating, O'Duffy has been a marginalised author because of his political convictions, and it is only now that his works begin to receive the critical attention they deserve. Katarzyna Ojrzynska's chapter analyses Ken Loach's film *Jimmy's Hall* (2014), which reclaims the figure of the Irish communist Jimmy Gralton, who ran a dancehall in the 1930s, where people challenged the new norms imposed by the Church and State, which focused on the rigidity of the dancer's body positions. Ojrzynska observes that Loach's film celebrates the "unruly Irish spirit" (57), representing "values with a strong presence in Irish music and dance, forms traditionally based on improvisation and individual style, before they were suppressed by the conservative post-independence authorities" (66). Part I establishes a constructive dialogue between present and past, between recent cultural phenomena and their roots in earlier forms of dissidence in Irish

culture.

Part II devotes two chapters to the carceral regime and the brutal treatment to which young women were subjected in the infamous Magdalene laundries for unmarried mothers. As Katherine O'Donnell's relates, many of these young women were doubly traumatised, as they had already been "victims of incest, sexual assault and rape" (82). Here, O'Donnell relates her own experiences as a participant in the Justice for Magdalenes Campaign (JMC), which began in 2009. The Campaign was eventually successful because, in 2013, former Taoiseach Enda Kenny gave a state apology and announced a redress scheme for survivors. In the next chapter, Miguel-Ángel Benítez-Castro and Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio provide a linguistic analysis of the metaphors used by the Magdalene survivors when they described the horror they suffered: "We observe how these women, enslaved in a state ruled by authoritarianism, conceive of themselves as containers ready to explode or that could break easily, and as fragile animals lacking in freedom and intelligence" (120). Part II concludes with Edwige Nault's chapter, where she traces Ireland's changing perceptions on abortion, from religious stigma, silence and state condemnation in the 1980s to the establishment in recent years of post-abortion and crisis pregnancy services funded by the state. Written before the 2018 referendum on abortion, Nault's chapter offers an insightful description of the new social attitudes which led to the removal of the Eighth Amendment. Part II becomes a powerful reminder of the vast injustices and cruelty which, until recently, had been inflicted on women on the grounds of sexual ethics and social respectability.

Part III highlights difference and dissent in the Irish public discourse. The first essay of this section, by Aidan O'Malley, foregrounds the important work published in the cultural journal *The Crane Bag*, between 1977 and 1985. In the 1981 issue, "Minorities in Ireland", the reader finds vital accounts of life in the margins for Travellers, homosexuals, the poor and the psychologically disturbed in Ireland. This issue of *The Crane Bag*, O'Malley argues, calls for a "positive re-evaluation of those who have been cast as scapegoats in Irish society" (161). In the next chapter, Marie-Violaine Louvet offers an overview of the Muslim communities in Ireland, which remained marginal and fragmented until 2006, when the Islamic Foundation of Ireland (IFI) was founded to act as interlocutor with the state. Louvet observes that, despite the efforts of IFI, the recognition of the Muslim minority community can only become possible "with a stronger participation from the Irish state" (186). Abdul Haliz Azeez and Carmen Aguilera-Carnerero look at social media in order to analyse the public discourse on Muslims in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Contrary to global trends where Muslims become the global "other", their findings reveal a rather unique Irish context: "Catholics or Protestants respectively appropriate the cause of Muslims and associate it with theirs to help their own interests" (210). Part III, therefore, shows the ways in which the public image of minorities has been shaped by journals, organisations and the social media.

Part IV addresses cultural representations of multiculturalism and immigration. In her chapter, Héléne Alfaro-Hamayon foregrounds the important work of drama companies that combat sectarianism and racism in contemporary Northern Ireland. Through their representations of ethnicity and migration, Alfaro-Hamayon explains, organisations such as Tinderboz, Arts Ekta and Terra Nova "reflect a move away from the affirmation of cultural difference towards the endorsement of interculturalism" (236). The next chapter, by Rosa González-Casademont, looks at the ways in which filmic representations and the media

discourse in Ireland have shared a focus “on the immigrants’ degree of integration into the host country” (241), thus reaffirming “conceptions of Irishness based on normative cultural and ethnic parameters” (242). A welcome exception to this is David O’Sullivan’s short-film *Moore Street Masala* (2009). As González-Casademont observes, in its celebration of Dublin’s multiculturalism, “the short offers a refreshing, if fleeting, vision of sites of cross-cultural and transnational connections” (257). In the final chapter, Sara Martín-Ruiz focuses on the effects of Direct Provision, a policy that confines asylum seekers and refugees in centres isolated from the general Irish population. The writings of Nigerian authors Melatu Okorie and Ifedinma Dimbo, for instance, reveal different strategies of political resistance against Direct Provision, which Martín-Ruiz defines as “the dictatorship of a racial and racist state which severely limits [asylum seekers’] freedoms” (280). All in all, the essays in Part IV highlight how, against a background of invisibility, minority ethnic voices have created platforms where their experiences of discrimination can be heard, and where they can celebrate cultural difference in an inclusive spirit.

Villar-Argáiz’s *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities* provides a vital examination of important aspects of Ireland’s political, social and cultural present moment, showing the linkages with the past and foregrounding voices of dissent that had been historically silenced by mainstream discourses. Villar-Argáiz’s collection adopts a multidisciplinary approach –including theoretical frameworks such as sociology, post-structuralism, queer studies, feminist ethical philosophy and critical discourse analysis– which deepens its thematic engagement with minorities and dissidence, giving various perspectives on the changing nature of Irish society and its slow but progressive acknowledgment of historical traumas and injustices. Tellingly, the essays do not limit themselves to a description of situations of exclusion or marginality, but they also illuminate the ways in which dissident voices managed to contest mainstream or official narratives, and how minority identities have strived for visibility, justice and recognition.

José Carregal-Romero

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