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## “Propaganda for peace”: A Gramscian Reading of Irish and Spanish Civil War Photography<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** At the outset of the Spanish Civil War, Ireland’s ruling party were faced with the challenge of maintaining political hegemony. Revealing the old fault lines of the Irish Civil War, the opposition cast the government’s Non-intervention policy as pro-Communist and anti-Catholic; a refusal to support Spanish insurgents in what was perceived by the majority as their defence of the Catholic faith. Following McNally, this paper utilises Gramsci’s theory of hegemony to explore political equilibrium in the contexts of the Irish and Spanish conflicts. The notion of the “organic intellectual” enables a Gramscian reading of war photography, finding common visual language in the works of Robert Capa and W.D. Hogan as they contributed to national and transnational projects of hegemony. Through such a reading, the author finds cultural compatibility between the conflicts and casts the Irish revolutionary period in new international light.

**Keywords.** Photography, propaganda, Irish Civil War, Spanish Civil War, Robert Capa, Desmond FitzGerald, W.D. Hogan, Gramsci.

**Resumen.** Al comienzo de la Guerra Civil española, el partido gobernante de Irlanda se enfrentó al desafío de mantener la hegemonía política. Revelando las antiguas líneas divisorias de la Guerra Civil irlandesa, la oposición calificó la política de no intervención del gobierno como pro-comunista y anticatólica; una negativa a apoyar a los insurgentes españoles en lo que la mayoría percibía como su defensa de la fe católica. Siguiendo a McNally, este artículo utiliza la teoría de la hegemonía de Gramsci para explorar el equilibrio político en los contextos de los conflictos irlandés y español. La noción de “intelectual orgánico” permite una lectura Gramsciana de la fotografía de guerra, encontrando un lenguaje visual común en las obras de Robert Capa y W.D. Hogan, ya que ambos contribuyeron a proyectos de hegemonía nacionales y transnacionales. A través de dicha lectura, la autora encuentra compatibilidad cultural entre los conflictos y muestra el período revolucionario irlandés bajo una nueva perspectiva internacional.

**Palabras clave.** Fotografía, propaganda, guerra civil irlandesa, guerra civil española, Robert Capa, Desmond FitzGerald, W.D. Hogan, Gramsci.

## Ireland's reaction to the Spanish Civil War

In September 1936, the literary magazine *Ireland To-day* published a special issue: "A Symposium on Spain". This issue was a summation of the publication's "unmitigated pity for the unfortunate Spanish" which highlighted the similarities between Spain's social and political problems and those that Ireland had witnessed only the previous decade (Editorial 1936, 1). *Ireland To-day* would revisit the subject of the Spanish conflict in January 1937, a return made mandatory by the active involvement of Irishmen in both sides of the struggle, prompting the editors to conclude that "with a striking similarity of motive and personnel, the civil war is being re-enacted in the Casa del [sic] Campo" (Editorial 1937, 2). Regarded by *Irish Times* writer Aodh de Blacam as a "Socialistic organ" which printed "anti-Catholic propaganda" (648), the position of *Ireland To-day* stood in marked contrast to wider press reportage in Ireland.<sup>2</sup> As O'Brien summarises:

Each of the three national titles framed the conflict through its own unique editorial ethos [...] the [*Irish*] *Times* put its emphasis on explaining the context of the conflict in terms of the relationship of the Catholic Church with the Spanish state and in defending the right of democratically elected governments to govern [...] the *Irish Independent* portrayed the war as an easily understood conflict between communism and Catholicism [...] [and] the *Irish Press* walked a non-intervention tightrope as advocated by the Irish government. As the *Press* viewed matters, both sides were at fault and the Irish state should not become involved. (356)<sup>3</sup>

This "tightrope" of non-intervention refers to the Fianna Fáil government's signing of the Non-Intervention Agreement in 1937, which meant that – officially – the Irish Free State opposed its citizens volunteering on either side of the Spanish conflict (Keene 116). In reality, however, 750 volunteers formed the pro-Franco Irish Brigade under General Eoin O'Duffy. Meanwhile, for the fewer – though no less important – Irishmen who fought in the pro-Republican International Brigades under Frank Ryan, the Spanish conflict represented the same fight as that at home in 1922-23. This split in response to the Spanish Civil War has provoked many historians to recognise a continuity between the Irish Civil War and the Spanish conflict which would begin fifteen years later (Allen 179; Burton 5; Jaspe 2011, 12; McGarry 2001, 37; O'Brien 345). Stradling goes as far to conclude that "any Irishmen who joined the International Brigades were looking for a chance to refight the Irish Civil War" (209). Similarly, in the pro-Franco forces, by many accounts, "the 'Blueshirts' wished merely to have another crack at their old civil-war enemies in the IRA in the International Brigades" (McGarry 1999, 18).

The men prompted to voluntary action were a minority, and as McNally writes, wider popular and political opinion "cannot in fact be reduced either to this 'pro-Franco' position informed by Catholic essentialism; or 'absolute neutrality'; or still less, a pro-Spanish Republic position" (70). Under de Valera, the Fianna Fáil government had successfully pursued "what the Anti-Treatyites had failed to achieve by force during the Civil War" and

by 1936 on the eve of the Spanish Civil War, the Fianna Fáil Party's hegemonic advance was gaining momentum as the Party proved increasingly successful in maintaining a healthy equilibrium between all the forces in its historical bloc while eroding further the opposition's support base. It was now, however, to face a significant threat from Fine Gael. (McNally 73-4)

This “significant threat” came in the form of Fine Gael’s identification of “the Government’s policy of Non-intervention as ‘pro-Communist’ and ‘anti-Catholic’ which was of course to revive Irish Civil War animosities” (McNally 76). By employing a Gramscian reading of Irish political reaction to the Spanish Civil War, McNally encourages a wider, international reading of a specific moment in the Free State’s nascency. If Non-intervention is a moment that challenged the hegemony and equilibrium of Ireland’s ruling party, then other events in the country’s revolutionary period can also be framed within the concepts of balance and equilibrium, and their continuous cycles of disruption, interruption and restoration. As McNally frames Fianna Fáil’s ruling of Ireland up until 1936 as “hegemonic advance...and healthy equilibrium” challenged by Fine Gael, so this paper reflects on the Irish Civil War of 1922-23 as a crucial moment in which Cumann Na nGaedheal (a predecessor of Fine Gael) attempted to restore equilibrium and move towards political and social hegemony in the nascency of the Irish Free State.

Gramsci’s theory of “hegemony” proves a valuable tool not only in interpreting the political strategy of Fianna Fáil in its defence of neutrality during the Spanish Civil War, but can also be extended to consider the attempts to restore hegemonic equilibrium during and immediately after the Irish Civil War. At the same time, I contend that Gramsci’s notion of the organic intellectual, an intrinsic part of building and maintaining hegemony, provides a crucial lens through which to consider the role of photographers and photography in both Ireland and Spain, as part of wider national and international political projects. Photography is read in terms of its visual “language” to uncover a cultural compatibility between the two conflicts. In doing so, I hope to answer the call of Delaney and McGarry to “look across, as well as back, to understand sudden political change, particularly when – as is so often the case in Ireland – revolutionary upheavals at home coincide with broader international crises” (3). In doing so, this paper attempts to shine a more international light – which has long illuminated the Spanish Civil War – onto Ireland’s own conflict of 1922-3.

### **Gramsci’s hegemony**

Before considering the photography of the respective civil wars, it is prudent to explore Gramsci’s theory of hegemony in relation to Ireland and Spain.<sup>4</sup> Bates summarises basic premise of the Marxist philosophy as “that man is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas...it means political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class” (351-2). McNally elaborates,

the principal aim of a hegemonic strategy was to provide the ideological cement to hold together this alliance of forces and especially to bond the politico-economic centre to the historically specific “national-popular” elements of the society in question by winning their active consent. For Gramsci this role which he described as “organizational” and “connective” was performed by the political party and “organic intellectuals” of a “leading group”. (71)

In the Irish context, the governing leaders of the Irish Free State, Cumann Na nGaedheal, sought to provide the ideological cement to bond a particularly fractious politico-economic centre as a result of the Irish Civil War. McNally’s outline of Fianna Fáil’s 1939 hegemonic strategy is also reminiscent of that of the inaugural government, in which the key component “is the deployment by its leading group of an innovative political language that interprets the new realities in favour of its continuing supremacy and the re-equilibrium of its dislocated elements” (73).

During the Irish Civil War, the Free State government faced the task of restoring equilibrium between Pro- and Anti-Treaty sides, many of whom had previously fought together during Ireland's War of Independence 1919-21. A key component of this "hegemonic strategy" was the formation of the Free State's Ministry for External Affairs, which also instigated an important shift in Spanish-Irish relations. During Ireland's Civil War, Spain's "ideological camps struggled to warm to the Irish issue" (Jaspe 2008, 121). The formation of the Ministry of External Affairs, however, meant that Ireland could take up a legitimizing place in the League of Nations and embark on bilateral relations which ultimately made it

diplomatically acceptable to the Spanish who saw the benefit of a Catholic Irish ally within Europe as a respectable, nonsubversive counter to Britain, especially one that toned down its Anglophobia and tried to portray a modern, independent stance, not solely dependent on opposition to British interests. (Jaspe 2008, 128)<sup>5</sup>

The Minister for External Affairs himself, Desmond FitzGerald, was now charged with leading the Free State's Publicity Department, its propaganda branch. As Hora relates, FitzGerald had an intelligent knowledge of the powers of publicity and propaganda, insisting that "propaganda during the war was based on democratic principles – what the people stood for was what we [the Department] should advertise" (33). By linking public beliefs and propaganda, FitzGerald's strategy directly reflects the Gramscian concept that "public opinion is strictly linked to political hegemony" (Bates 363). By deploying an official state photographer during the Irish Civil War, W.D. Hogan, FitzGerald oversaw the innovation of a *visual* political language that interpreted the new realities of the Civil War in favour of the Free State.<sup>6</sup>

This intertwining of political principles and public communications resonates with Gramsci's "conviction that language and art [...] have meaning only insofar as they express or mobilize cultural values – values which are always those of a particular social group or groups" (Labanyi 96). Briziarelli and Martínez interpret this further when they write that, for Gramsci, "language is metaphorical in the sense that signs are arbitrary representations of the object [...] metaphors, like signs, imply that language cannot represent the world objectively but rather by the mediation of symbols, rhetorical figures historically determined and historically mutating" (46). This mobilisation of cultural values through metaphor and symbolism can be effectively applied to visual as much as verbal language. In photography this is especially pertinent, where "the evidentiary and testimonial authority of the medium depends on complex habits of observation and a set of assumptions and beliefs that continually shift according to the culture and interests of those who use and read them, as well as those who make them" (Duganne, 59).<sup>7</sup>

Any potential answer to the questions of who uses, reads, and makes these photographic observations becomes highly complex. To refer to the "two" photographers whose work is considered in this paper alone fails to confront the complexities of authorship and ownership in both Irish and Spanish Civil War photography. While Hogan was employed as a Free State photographer to officially document the conflict, there is very little documented about his life and work. Hogan is often lost in any reference to the photographs he took during the Civil War years which are referred to as "The Desmond Fitzgerald Photographs" in both the digital and physical University College Dublin (UCD) archives where they reside, and which have been used to source the photographs in this paper. Meanwhile, the National Library of Ireland's "Hogan-Wilson Collection", also available online, gives a single line of scant bibliography: "The photographer W.D. Hogan, who was based in Henry Street, Dublin, thanks to the official sanction of Sinn Féin during the War of

Independence and the official sanction of the national army during the Civil War had a ringside seat at many historically significant events during these years” (National Library of Ireland Catalogue). Bibliographical information given by UCD furnishes no additional detail about the life of Hogan. There are, however, further details of Hogan’s working conditions and agenda:

One must assume that Hogan was commissioned to photograph events during the Civil War from an Irish Free State perspective. The resulting work tends to reflect either anti-Treaty destruction or Irish Free State military success. Hogan was probably not in the firing line on many occasions although there are some action shots and photographs of the Irish Free State army advancing on land and by sea. Much of his work includes the presence of civilians, suggesting that major confrontation was over when he was in action. (UCD Digital Library)

While Hogan was mainly documenting the aftermath the conflict, the proximity of Robert Capa’s photography to the action in Spain reflected his now famous philosophy: “If your pictures aren’t good enough, you’re not close enough” (Duganne 57). The photography of Robert Capa is commonly attributed to the independent Hungarian photographer André Friedmann, without reference to his association with fellow photojournalist Gerda Taro (real name Gerta Pohorylle) “who had not only helped him invent ‘Robert Capa’ [...] but who also collaborated photographically with him by selling pictures under both names to mostly left-wing magazines and newspapers” (Hardt 31). While this multiplicity of authorship serves to complicate attribution, the shapeshifting nature of the photographs’ visual language can still be fruitfully examined. As Hardt writes, modern war photography (a genre which Hardt deems Taro and Capa to have helped invent) “is a complex relationship of culturally specific expectations between the exegeses of the photographers, the project of their editors, and the gaze of the readers” (32). This affirmation of multiplicities throughout the process of press photography production and consumption further corroborates a Gramscian interpretation of photography as a visual language, defined by processes of mediation and mutation.

While Hogan’s work stemmed from Cumann Na nGaedheal’s hegemonic strategy to restore national equilibrium, Capa’s work was directed under an alternative strategy for *international* equilibrium. In 1930s Paris, Capa had “developed his particular way of seeing [...] where he visually accompanied, and politically sympathised with, the Popular Front” (Möller 95). Capa’s affiliation with trans-European antifascism no doubt informed his work when he and Taro “crash-landed into Spain early in August 1936, after being sent to Barcelona by *Vu* magazine” (Tremlett 122). There, Capa would embed himself with the XII International Brigade, formerly named the Garibaldi Battalion due to its roots in the Italian Communist Party (PCI). Given his proximity to Italian antifascist troops, it is possible that Capa would have encountered the writings and theories of Gramsci, whose PCI comrade, Giuseppe Di Vittorio (alias Nicoletti), fought in the same battalion and had in fact helped set up the brigades. According to Tremlett, “like Gramsci, Di Vittorio knew about the importance of publicity and propaganda. He was convinced that people across the world need to be persuaded that the International Brigades were living proof that the world’s left could unite against fascism” (130).

Although the photographs selected here are a small sample from a much larger number of photographs taken in both conflicts, they afford an insight into the common visual language translated and transposed by Hogan and Capa for the purposes of political hegemony. As the remainder of this paper sets out, the works of each photographer can be read in terms of their propaganda aims: Hogan’s, for the purposes of a governmental

propaganda branch, and Capa's, for the international antifascist project of "propaganda for peace" (Hüppauf 71).

### **The language of body and ruin**

Baylis contends that "in terms of the emergence of the modern state, and Ireland is no exception, visualising plays a central role, and photography, in particular because it provided a popular medium to disseminate ideas" (184). In the case of the FitzGerald collection, photography was the medium through which to disseminate ideas that would bolster hegemonic public support for the Free State. Meanwhile, Capa's visualisation of the horrors in Spain provided an effective medium through which an international pacifist agenda could be articulated in newspapers and journals worldwide. With their similarities in theme and subject, the political nature of Capa's and Hogan's photography provides important frames and lenses through which to inspect the nature of the hegemony at both national and international level, communicated through the language of war and masculinised heroism; body and ruin.

Detailed inspection of these photographs requires consideration of the wider context of war photography as it emerged during the First World War. As Hüppauf writes in "Experiences of Modern Warfare and the Crisis of Representation":

Despite common knowledge of many details about this war of mass armies, technology, and economic strength, the images associated with it remained predominantly archaic images of individual suffering and heroism. Photography of the war, even in its later phases, tended to present the battles as extensions of traditional warfare with modern armor added. The world of photographic representation maintained the archaic war that came to an end in 1915 even when images of early enthusiasm were replaced with those of suffering, exhaustion, or despair. The structural changes of the battlefield, which led to the artificial creation of a new reality for which only the traditional word "front" was available, were lost in a type of photography that maintained as its central object the fighting, running, resting, eating, laughing, dying soldier. (51)

This thematic commitment to "traditional warfare" maintained a continuity in visual language in which the main subject was the heroic, *masculine* soldier. Denying the new mechanised horrors of modern warfare, "the new media thus contributed to the postwar social and political project of inventing an imaginary reality that negated the modernity of the war" (Hüppauf 52). Whilst this project no doubt had a morale-oriented agenda, in the Irish context, this reiteration and reinforcement of such a gendered imaginary reality was essential, as the country emerged from Civil War and into its nascent existence as the Irish Free State. For Baylis, "if youthful masculinity serves in [Irish] nationalist discourse as the source for regeneration, fully grown adult masculinity functions as a signifier of the nation as being" (198). In the Irish Civil War, this "fully grown adult masculinity" manifests as the Free State soldier, his body signifying the health and vitality of the nation. Under this ideology, just as the Free State soldier came under threat from anti-Treaty forces, so too did the country as a whole. Meanwhile, Robert Capa's famed photograph *Death of a loyalist militiaman* "imaged the Republic itself in its archetypal soldier" (Nelson 316). Embodying the Spanish Republic as a whole, the militiaman's falling body would become a central feature of Spanish Civil War iconography, as well as an emblem of anti-war discourse years after. With the ironic imaging of the Spanish Republic in the body of a dying man, Capa was perhaps prophesying the future loss for the Republican side to General Franco. More persuasive, however, is the

possibility that Capa was engaging in a political mission of his own, what Bernd Hüppauf describes as “propaganda for peace” (71). As Möller writes, “as a war photographer, he was hoping for unemployment. Capa, while insisting on the necessity to document war visually, did not celebrate war as a social institution. Many of his photographs allude to peace as a potentiality, nurturing the belief – and the hope – that peace may return once violence stops” (90). This moment of death does not celebrate death in war, but rather laments yet another unnecessary loss.

The concept of the male body signifying the state has particular pertinence when considering photographs that denote injury. In her investigation of Capa’s photography, Brothers identifies that “human beings in Spain were only ever allegorically wounded, pristine white dressings transforming the rawness of the injury into anodyne symbol” (162). Inspection of both photographers’ works reveals this same phenomenon. In *Refugees from Malaga*, a small child sits in the arms of (one presumes) his father, accompanied by a slightly older child – a sibling, perhaps (Capa 1937).<sup>8</sup> A white bandage encircles the child’s head, halo-like, neutralising any potential horrors that may lie beneath the dressing. Just as Brothers describes, the rawness of the child’s head injury is made anodyne, and the image becomes an archetypal family portrait, with only a hint of the destruction that the refugees are fleeing. As a result, the horrors of modern warfare are covered over, with the image focusing instead on the humility and innocence of a child caught up in Civil War. In Hogan’s work within the FitzGerald collection, we see the same symbolic language. In *A man lying with closed eyes in a bed*, it is uncertain whether the central male figure is dead or asleep (Hogan 1922-23d).<sup>9</sup> The pristine bandage prevents any direct confrontation with either death or injury, its small white rectangle across the man’s nose denoting a passing acknowledgement of the destructive nature of conflict.

According to Brothers, this visual language of injured male body with pristine white bandage served a particular purpose in its publication by French and British presses: certainly, they showed “evidence of wartime wounding, but theirs was evidence of a very particular kind – evidence that documented attitudes towards injury rather than the nature of the injury itself” (168). While Capa and Hogan also captured photographs of a more disturbing nature during the respective conflicts, including portraits of dead infants, these images of stark clean bandages covering the wounded appear to be caught between the “moral commitment and the aesthetic requirements” that characterised the dilemma of anti-war photography (Hüppauf 64). In Capa’s work, this was particularly crucial when publishing in the countries whose own citizens were engaging directly in Spanish warfare through the International Brigades. It is unsurprising that images of bloody injury and mortal wounds were not the kind that these newspapers looked for when presenting the Spanish Civil War to readers at home. Instead, the pristine white bandages allowed the press to uphold the international hegemonic “imaginary reality that negated the modernity of the war” (Hüppauf 52).

In Hogan’s state-sanctioned photographs, the morality and aestheticism of the images come second to their propaganda aims and objectives. The presentation of pristine bodies is significant in striking a balance, showing the soldiers as committing a heroic sacrifice on behalf of the Free State without denigrating the body to the extent that showed the soldier/state under threat from the anti-Treaty forces. Even the photograph of *Members of a medical corps tending the leg of a wounded man* manages to evade bloody detail, focusing instead on the men attending (Hogan 1922-23c). Such images of injury are of a different category. Taken in the turbulence of the streets, the peace of the hospital ward is swapped for the chaos of the streets. Still, however, the detail of the injured body is avoided, and if these men are to be read as “signifiers of the nation as being”, then the strength of the Free State can be read in the fraternal stoicism of these men-of-action. Capa’s photographs contain the same visual language of soldierly alliance and care, particularly in his numerous photographs

of Republican soldiers assisting each other in battle. *Republican soldier helping wounded comrade to safety, University City, Madrid* depicts one member of the Brigade assisting a wounded comrade during battle north of Madrid (Capa 1936a). With the same iconic bandage, any focus on injury and threat is swapped out for the theme of comradeship and fraternity. In a similar image, this time taken near Fraga at the Aragon front, one loyalist fighter bears his wounded comrade on his back (Capa 1938). Most memorable of these such images, however, is another from the same battle in Fraga. Capa's photograph of a Republican soldier taking down the last words of his mortally injured comrade is the ultimate combination of morality and aestheticism (1938a). Whilst the dying man's bandage may be slightly bloodied, the focus of the photograph draws our attention to an alternate pristineness, that of the soldier's notebook in which he writes the dying man's final utterances. In this single image, the pathos for the dying man serves Capa's moral obligations, whilst simultaneously upholding the avoidance of direct injury for the sake of international denial. Above all, it is aesthetic. The gleam of the halo-like bandage mirrored in the whiteness of the notepad creates an overall depiction of humane innocence destroyed by inhumane warfare.

Just as civil war saw the injury and destruction of the male human body, so too were buildings and architecture casualties of the conflict. Images of destroyed buildings, as extensions of the state, again served alternate propaganda purposes. In Capa's work, post-air-raid ruins offer an alternative visual language that served both aesthetic and moral objectives which combined in his "propaganda for peace". Hüppauf describes this campaign as being "based on a more-or-less explicit opposition between the human face and the menace of war, between peaceful production and martial destruction" resulting in "the illusion that the photographic lens itself has adopted an empathetic emotional position" (71). In Capa's ruin photographs, the "human face" is visible in the exposed interiors of homes, the exterior walls rent asunder by "the menace of war" in the form of Fascist bombs. One such photograph is *Interior of building destroyed by Nationalist air raids, Madrid* (Capa 1936-37). The destroyed walls of the building create a frame within the frame of the photograph itself, through which the interior of a dining or drawing room is exposed. Most striking is the everyday domestic detail found in the patterned wallpaper and wooden sideboard. The central focus of the photograph is a third frame – a family portrait which miraculously appears not only to have survived the air-raid but even hangs straight and undisturbed on the wall. Indicative of the endurance of the human spirit, perhaps, this image is typical of Capa and the emphatic empathy with which he examines the confrontation between human victims and inhumane war.<sup>10</sup>

While ruins provided Capa with the ideal intersection of aestheticism and morality, the same visual language served a clearer ideological purpose for the Irish government. Using similar techniques of "framing" that would later be employed by Capa, Hogan's photographs of ruined buildings testify not to the enduring spirit of family but the endurance of the Catholic state. An image of church ruins presents the Irish Free State in terms of its unwavering religiosity and faith, a crucial element in establishing political hegemony. In *Gutted interior of a church* the camera lens (and by extension, the viewer), looks through a blown-out window frame, presumably rendered glassless by an explosion (Hogan 1922-23b). Inside, the church is completely gutted and roofless, with the floor impossible to make out amongst fallen metal and other debris. The main focus of the photograph stands on the opposite wall of the church. With doorframe, stained-glass window, bell, and cross still intact, the partial remnants of the church are visible enough to make the propaganda statement clear: having withstood the horrors of war, the church is an emblem of the strong faith of the Irish Free State. It could possibly be making an even stronger claim: that God is on side of the State.<sup>11</sup>

By confronting the violent consequences of war on both body and building, Capa and Hogan reflect in photographic terms what has previously been described of modernist writers. Cole considers a critical element of literary representations of violence during the modernist period in

a tendency to move in two opposing directions—toward the private, subjective, and personal, rooted in the body, with an emphasis on elemental experience and originary cultural constructions; and toward the representative, where larger, often political readings are invited. (12)

Applying these terms to photography, images share the same visual allegory as literary texts, “such as in the figure of the house or tree as representative of the nation” (Cole 14). As a result, Capa and Hogan’s works are elevated to an artform, following Cole’s conclusion that “to write or paint or take a photograph was, in some important sense, to answer violence in an observable form” (198).

### **The photographer as “organic intellectual”**

Aligning war photography with writing and painting is to align the war photographer with the artist. The photographer – as artist – does not merely preserve snapshots of real-life events as they happen, but also frames, designs and constructs. In such terms, the photographer can be considered under the framework of “artist as ‘organic intellectual’” (Labanyi 107). One of Gramsci’s key concepts, the organic intellectual “respects cultural pluralism by trying to view the way of life (‘folklore’) of the various subaltern groups from the inside, in order to help such groups, through education and popular culture, articulate their aspirations” (Labanyi 105). Organic intellectuals played a key role in providing the “ideological cement”, as McNally describes, to bond the political centre with historically specific “national-popular” elements of society (71). Capa had developed such an “inside” approach in 1930s Paris and later “applied this experience to the Spanish Civil War: instead of showing demonstrations from the inside, now he got inside the battlefields. At the same time, he cultivated his interest in ordinary people and their living conditions” (Möller 96).

While Hogan seemingly did not photograph frontline action, elements of this hegemonic approach are still discernible as he operated under FitzGerald’s directive, where propaganda was seen as a direct reflection of “what the people stood for” (Hora 33). Just as the organic intellectual is tasked with viewing subaltern groups and communicating their aspirations, so much of Hogan’s work includes “the presence of civilians...with interesting vignettes particularly in the form of small boys who seemed to materialise...[and] troops often wear[ing] a mixture of military and civilian dress” (UCD Digital Library). The ease with which many of the civilians appear in Hogan’s photographs would appear to communicate an important propaganda message that the Irish people are supportive of the Free State.

The hegemonic approach of the “organic intellectual” can be detected most emphatically in staged photographs. A prominent example is Robert Capa’s (in)famous image, *Death of a loyalist militiaman*, also known as “the Falling Soldier” (1936). This iconic image of the Spanish Civil War, at first praised for its miraculous timing in memorialising the moment of a man’s death, has since been denounced as staged (Tremlett 2009). While its iconic nature allows its previous status to be partially preserved, the political implications of this revelation produce an entirely different reading of the photograph. In its untainted state, “The Falling Soldier” embodies an international ideal of dignified sacrifice. Shot twice-over, by the bullet and by the camera, against a dramatic empty backdrop, the man’s death is made

meaningful through the camera's immortalising powers. Viewed with the possibility of its inauthenticity, the image still retains a similar, although slightly diminished power. Whilst no longer representative of a "true" moment in the Civil War, the image still offers important insight into the nature of the Spanish conflict and its indelible impact on public consciousness. For Brothers, it is "indicative of a collective imagination which wanted and still wants to believe certain things about the nature of death [...] that death was heroic, and tragic, and that the individual counted and that his death mattered" (183). The photograph also testifies to the personal-political: "his sacrifice was in the name of a cause, and was steeped in the idealism with which he fought. Moreover, it was aesthetic" (Brothers 183).

In this case, the very aestheticism of the image trumps its authenticity. Even after the revelation of its staged nature, the history of the image is potent enough for it to retain its aura, and Capa's status as photographer is raised to that of an artist, whose stage-managed images can still reveal as much about the myths surrounding conflict as the facts.<sup>12</sup> This shift in the photograph's historical interpretation speaks to Gramsci's assumption that "metaphorical meanings change over time and thus are historically determined" (Briziarelli and Martínez 46). By employing a "universalising iconography", Capa made his work as "quotable" as Picasso's *Guernica*, producing a visual referent that would shift from the Spanish Civil War context to that of global conflict and pacifism (Pucci 2020).

In Hogan's work, two images show not only a moment of staged photography but also the specific political agenda of the Free State Government during the Civil War. The images of *A large jubilant group of Irish Free State Army soldiers and civilians* and *A large group of Irish Free State Army soldiers and civilians* depict the same group, seemingly shot seconds or minutes apart (Hogan 1922-23; 1922-23a). In the "jubilant" image, the group run forward towards the camera with hands waving in the air in jubilation, smiling and laughing and in the second, the same group sit and stand in orderly positions in a standard group shot. The identical buildings in the background and same uninvolved figure set apart from the throng would appear to confirm that these photographs were taken within a short space of time. The meticulous management of the stationary group shot also suggests that the more dynamic image is also a staged rather than spontaneous event. The implications of this makes the intended reading of the photographs particularly pertinent to the hegemonic aims of the Publicity Department. Depicting a group of both civilians and soldiers together in a single image and in a moment of shared jubilation and celebration sends a clear message that the Free State Government is on the side of the people and working towards its best interests.

Far from serving merely documentary purposes, photography during both the Irish and Spanish Civil Wars offered a medium through which both national and transnational hegemonic agendas could be pursued. In the case of Capa, his position as an anti-war photographer answered the dilemma of capturing sympathetic images which would cater to international audiences, while fulfilling both aesthetic style and antifascist message. In Ireland, Desmond FitzGerald knew the intrinsic propagandist function of photography which was used without scruple. The images captured by W.D. Hogan are a clear attempt to present the Irish Free State Army in line with traditional ideals of a Catholic and masculine statehood. By necessity, the photographers in both conflicts became creative in their endeavours, and in doing so, blurred the lines between reality and fiction, elevating their positions from documentarian photographer to that of stage director, artist, or indeed "organic intellectual". In capturing soldiers and civilians, buildings and churches, Capa and Hogan each utilised the camera to project both new and mythologised versions of gender and statehood to domestic and international audiences. Their work constitutes personal and professional propaganda – for peace, or otherwise.

## Contesting peace

Capa's Spanish Civil War photography constituted the work of an organic intellectual contributing to the larger international aim of antifascist hegemony shared by International Brigaders, Frank Ryan and his fellow Irishmen amongst them. Articulated in this paper as "propaganda for peace", it prompts consideration of another form of peace work claimed in the same period. As discussed in the opening of this paper, the Irish government at the time of the Spanish Civil War was faced with a threat to its hegemonic order, as the opposition party Fine Gael attempted to frame their Non-intervention policy as a pro-communist and anti-Catholic. As McNally sets out, "the most persistent and most successful line of argument raised by Fianna Fáil in defence of Non-intervention was that it was in the interests of 'European peace'" (84). This articulation of Non-intervention as a pro-European and peace-bringing initiative had the ultimate effect of "stabilizing and binding together the various elements of Irish identity and finally putting an end to the unsteadiness that had been created by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War as the Party restored its equilibrium and hegemony on a new and more enduring basis" (McNally 86). The language also harks back to a statement made by de Valera in 1917: "Free Ireland does not mean Revolution: It means peace and prosperity... A Free Ireland means – not Red Ruin – but the salvation from Red Ruin" (Beatty 66). This statement alone reflects not only the centrality of peace in civil war language – and its changing definitions for those who claim it – but also neatly encapsulates the changing dynamics recognised by Gramsci's theories of hegemony and equilibrium. De Valera's party would invoke "peace" as a justification for Free Ireland's Non-intervention in "red" Spain's Civil War, merely two decades after invoking peace as driving force for Ireland's Independence. The intervening years would see "revolution" become a key part of this journey to independence, which would leave the new government establishing a hegemony that de Valera's party would come to disrupt and re-establish under their own terms a decade later. Ireland's history in this short period mirrors that of the Second Spanish Republic, confirming that "hegemony is not permanent, but is a fragile achievement which is usually temporary - measured in decades rather than centuries" (Cox 11).

Seeing Ireland's own Civil War and its response to Spain's conflict in these Gramscian terms encourages a consideration of "cultural rethinking across national boundaries" (Labanyi 96). In the context of Irish historiography, this paper answers the recent call of Delaney and McGarry to globalise the consideration of Irish historic events alongside other international "revolutionary episodes which clearly influenced each other in a variety of significant ways" (3-4). As the centenary years of the Irish Civil War approach, time will tell if public commemoration of the conflict will too answer this call.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article has been adapted from a conference paper entitled "'Propaganda for peace': the iconography of body and ruin in Irish and Spanish Civil War photography" given by the author at the Modernist Studies Association Conference in Toronto, Canada, 18th October 2019. Sincere thanks are expressed to the editors and reviewers of *Estudios Irlandeses* whose recommendations and guidance were invaluable in the development of this article.

<sup>2</sup> The Spanish counterpart to *Ireland To-day's* special edition could perhaps be regarded as a special publication of the Galician journal *Nós* published in 1921, "fully devoted to Ireland as a tribute to Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, who had died after a hunger strike in 1920; the publication of Ramón Otero Pedrayo's partial translation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1926 and the translations of two plays by W. B. Yeats published in 1935 by the Vilar Ponte brothers and Plácido Castro" (Membrive-Pérez 169).

<sup>3</sup> For further consideration of Irish press coverage of the Spanish Civil War, see McGarry (2002) and Burton.

<sup>4</sup> Gramsci also considered two Irish political events in his writings. See Thomas and Cox.

<sup>5</sup> According to Jaspe, “the Irish case was still regarded as neither revolutionary or radical by the left in Spain” (123). This resonates with Gramsci’s concept of the “passive revolution” or “revolution without a revolution” (Beatty 57-59).

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of Irish state propaganda up until the revolutionary era, see Inoue (154-72).

<sup>7</sup> Gramsci also uses the photograph as a metaphor to describe language: “Grammar is [...] the ‘photograph’ of a given phase of a national (collective) language that has been formed historically and is continuously developing [...]. The practical question might be: what is the purpose of such a photograph? To record the history of an aspect of civilization or to modify an aspect of civilization?” (Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, 179-80).

<sup>8</sup> A different image of the same family in the same location is attributed to Capa’s partner Gerda Taro. See Taro (1936).

<sup>9</sup> The abstract alongside the image in the UCD digital archive describes the subject as “possibly dead or wounded” (Hogan 1922-23d).

<sup>10</sup> Such instances seem to be a common marker within accounts of Spanish Civil War experiences. Louis Macneice would recall the memorable image of post-air raid ruins in the Catalan capital: “*Ruins*: near the cathedral a house six stories high, its face and floors torn away; on the top story a plate-rack fixed to the wall with all its plates unbroken and a shelf with two unbroken bottles. The district to the side of the port, Barceloneta, has been evacuated; all the streets are rubble, and all the houses like skulls” (361).

<sup>11</sup> The visual language of church ruin, especially intertwined with religion, was employed by photographers and publications on both sides of the Spanish Civil War, serving the shared purpose of laying the charge of anti-Catholicism at the feet of the opposing side (Bair 243; Capa 1936b).

<sup>12</sup> As Hardt (34) and Tremlett (122) both attest to, both Capa and Taro aimed for action and dramatic detail over authenticity and fact.

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