SITES OF CINEMATOGRAPHIC MEMORY: "BLACK'47" AS A CONSTRUCTION OF THE IRISH PAST

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Abstract. This article deals with how the history of the Great Irish Famine of the 1840s is reconstructed and presented to the global viewers of the film Black'47 (2018). It shows that the film's narrative reflected a Nationalist perception of the Irish past which condemns the role of the British politicians of the time. It also concludes that the film provides an opportunity for the Irish in Ireland and abroad with a site of cinematographic memory that transcends the national borders of Ireland and engages the public in the process of remembering and reconstructing the history of this calamity.

Keywords: Irish film, Great Irish Famine, memory, public history, Black 47, Irish history

The Great Irish Famine is a watershed event in Ireland, the memory of which has survived in the Irish collective memory until the present day. In the last two decades, a plethora of publications dealt with the Famine events from different perspectives while dividing scholars into three major groups. Nationalist, Revisionist and Post-Revisionist historians provided divergent views about what happened in Ireland in the 1840s. Apart from professional historians, the filmmaker Lance Daly contributed to the construction of the Famine events in his film *Black'47* (2018). He attempted to show how the Irish lived under British rule in the year 1847 - the peak of Famine.

Traditional historians, who show commitment to method and training, have shown a rejection of films as a source of information

as filmmakers often sacrifice truth to an emotional and subjective construction of the events. They argue that films lack historical accuracy while providing the viewers with a distorted version of the events[1]. The impact of films is undoubtedly overwhelming compared to academic publications. While films could reach millions of viewers, academic books and articles do not generally go beyond the confines of the academic circles. Despite the digitization of books, the appeal of films still has a wider reach.

In Ireland, scholars are divided over the adequacy of the use of films as a historical source. In 2014, the historian Diarmaid Ferriter proves to be highly critical of the Irish government's video "Ireland Inspires", which was used in preparation for the 2016 commemorations. Ferriter dismisses the video as being "embarrassing unhistorical shit". However, the historians Thomas Cauvin and Ciaran O'Neill do not object to historical videos since they outline the importance of the Irish public in producing public history[2]. They also argue that the Irish government has been actively involved in sponsoring public history events such as commemorations, since the 1940s[3].

According to David Dean, Public History is not only about the way the past is presented to the public but also about the involvement of the public in the construction and representation of past events[4]. Though the audience of mainstream historians is specialist scholars in their field of research, public historians embrace a different form of historical practice at the core of which is the contribution of the public to the understanding and construction of past events. While mainstream scholars share their findings in conferences organized by learned societies to specialists and students training to be historians, public history practitioners seek to study the shared understanding of the past by the public.
More importantly, the Irish in Ireland and abroad have shown active involvement in public history since the early days of the emergence of social media. In the early 2000s, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, internet blogs and other forms of digital media have been used to discuss historical events and to engage in a public debate on how

the Irish past should be understood. In fact, social media has made it possible to make historical content available for the wider public. It is worth noting that academics also use social media and websites to share historical content.

This article studies the way in which the film *Black'47* represents a form of public history of the Great Irish Famine. It deals with how the history of the calamity is reconstructed and presented to the global viewers of the film. It attempts to show how the screening the Great Irish Famine, which engages the public in forging an understanding of past events, provides an alternative view of the events. Despite the subjectivity of Public History, this article tries to examine the extent to which the representation of the Great Irish Famine in this film contributes to the debate on the contested understanding of what happened. It is worth noting that the study of historical fiction is under-researched in Irish Studies. Accordingly, this article provides a contribution to the field of Public History through the study of a non-researched subject which is the representation of the Great Irish Famine in the historical film.

BLACK'47'S STORY

The film tells the story of an Irish ranger, Martin Feeney, who deserted the British army in 1847 to join his family in Ireland. On his arrival to Connemara, Feeney found out that his mother had died of starvation and that his brother was hung as he stubbed a bailiff during the eviction of his family. Shortly after meeting his brother's family, he witnessed their eviction during which his nephew was shot dead and he was arrested. In the constabulary office, he defeated the officers and run away. When he went back to the roofless house of his brother, he found his sister-in-law and niece dead of hunger and cold. The rest of the film's events are about Feeney taking revenge from all those who caused harm and suffering to his family.

Feeney took revenge from the rent collector, a judge, a Protestant priest and a landlord. After Feeney's flight from the Constabulary, the task of arresting him was assigned to a snobbish British officer who was helped by an experienced Ranger, Hannah. The latter was Feeney's fellow in the war in Afghanistan.

It is worth noting that the film received funding from different institutions such as the Irish Film Board, the Council of Europe's Eurimages and the Film Fund Luxembourg. The fact that the film was produced in the context of international co-productions involving the Irish Film Board ensured that the film contributed to the globalization of the Irish identity.

THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BLACK'47

Although the film is historical fiction, it has attempted to reconstruct the events of the Great Irish Famine. Though it ignored some important issues related to the Famine period, such as the Public Works scheme and the role of the Irish Poor Law in providing assistance to the paupers, it reconstructed the context of Anglo-Irish relations in the nineteenth century and referred to the major events of the Famine years.

The film undoubtedly refers to the mass evictions of the Irish paupers whose dwellings were made roofless or destroyed by the bailiffs in order to force them outside the landlords' properties. Central to *Black'47*'s story is the eviction of Feeney's family members and their subsequent death either from the cold or at the hands of the constabulary.

Historical records show that the evictions were made legal by the Quarter Acre Clause or the Gregory clause, which was introduced in 1847 by William Henry Gregory with the support of 119 members of the British Parliament[5]. During the Famine years, the clause enabled the landlords not only to evict the tenants who did not pay the rent but also to disqualify them from the relief lists. To become eligible for public assistance, the tenants holding more than

a quarter of an acre of land had to surrender their lands and dwellings to the landlords.

The staunchest supporters of clearances wanted to bring the land under culture into a more profitable system of cultivation. To this end, they wanted to enforce the consolidation of small holdings into larger farms and the conversion of tenants into labourers earning daily wages. The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, openly declared that systematic and extensive ejectments were the key elements for the required change in Ireland. He stated in a memorandum, dated 31 March 1848, that any remedial measure should preserve *"the right of ejectment"*[6]. In response to the criticism that the clause might wipe out the class of smallholders of land, Gregory asserted that "*he did not see of what use such small farmers could possibly be"*[7]. He regarded the tenants as an obstacle to economic progress and called for the protection of the landlords from *"bankruptcy"* and *"extinction"*[8].

Despite the fact that the film focused on the hostility of the English ruling class against the Irish tenants through the introduction of the system of evictions, it did not mention some politicians who defended the Irish paupers. In fact, the historical records of the time show that there were English politicians who were critical of the British governments' policies. The Radical MP for Rochdale, Sharman Crawford, for example, criticised the Quarter-Acre clause on the ground that it was introduced in the interest of the landlords and at the expense of the paupers[9]. Moreover, the nationalist MP for Cork City, W. Fagan, condemned the government's claim that the evictions of the tenants would protect them from starvation as they would be made eligible for the indoor relief in the Irish workhouses. He argued that the system of evictions and dispossessions of the paupers would endanger the already precarious living conditions of the smallholders of land:

> It should be remembered that for six weeks in every year a great portion of the people of Ireland were in a state of destitution; and it had been shown that

> 95,000 families, consisting of about 300,000 individuals, were existing upon holdings of less than a quarter of an acre[10].

Additionally, Fagan drew attention to the fact that all the landholders subject to evictions were to be made permanent applicants for relief since their residence was to be demolished after the reception of indoor assistance. Accordingly, he concluded that the system of eviction left the smallholders at the mercy of the landlords.

In *Black'47*, the scene of eviction of Feeney's family was ruthless as it provided an opportunity for the constabulary and the landlord's agent to take revenge from the family members by destroying the roof of their house and shooting Feeney's nephew in a cold-blooded way. What mattered most for the land agent was the destruction of the roof of the house in order to evict its inhabitants who were perceived as a burden on the land. Feeney's offer to pay the debts of his family was rejected.

Though the film *Black 47* did not mention the extent to which the Irish suffered in the workhouses, it made reference to one of the most stigmatising relief measures which was the soup kitchens. The latter existed under the form of public and private soup kitchens funded by religious groups or individuals. The government's scheme of soup kitchens came into operation after the introduction of the Temporary Relief Act or the Soup Kitchen Act in February 1847. The Act stipulated that soup kitchens had to be established in the poorest areas to provide free soups to the paupers[11]. Since the scheme emphasised the principle of local responsibility, the British government's contribution to the funding of the soup kitchens was equal to the funds collected by the Local Relief Committees which were in charge of the distribution of relief at the local level.

The New Poor Law introduced a fundamental change in the financing of relief. The government wanted the expenditure on the alleviation of destitution in Ireland to fall completely upon the tax-payers. Though the cost of relief under the soup system had reduced the expenditure of the government to a minimum, the major

officials engaged in the management of Irish relief proved to be increasingly committed to the principles of political economy. The undersecretary to the Treasury, Charles Trevelyan, stated: "There is only one way in which the relief of the destitute ever has been, or ever will be, conducted consistently with the general welfare, and that is by making it a local charge"[12]. At this stage, the officials of the government appeared to overestimate the resources of the Irish property and to ignore the fact that the Famine extended to the third year. To provide a rationale for the financial disengagement of the government, Trevelyan asserted that the new duties of the landlords would be restricted to the granting of relief to the really destitute[13]. However, the government decided that an exception should be made for a number of twenty-two unions along the western coast. These unions, which were declared as distressed, received external assistance as their local resources were too limited to support the paupers[14].

It is worth noting that private charity played a key role in the provision of relief in 1847. In point of fact, large sums of money were collected abroad and sent to Ireland for the mitigation of destitution. One of the big private organisations which was engaged in the mitigation of destitution in Ireland was the British Relief Association. While other organisations acted independently from the government's agencies of relief, the British Relief Association operated its action through the already established Local Relief Committees. The Whig government made use of the funds of this organisation to implement the distribution of soup in the most affected localities. For example, in order to establish a soup-kitchen in Swineford and Crossmolina, which were in the county of Mayo, the Chairman of the Relief Commission proposed to the Treasury to draw on the funds of the British Relief Association[15].

The Society of Friends, which established the precedent of the soup kitchens before the British government, collected funds from abroad for the purpose of providing food gratuitously to the distressed class in Ireland.

Even though many private parties from different religious denominations proved to be highly engaged in the alleviation of Irish destitution, a group of proselytisers assisted only the people who accepted to be converted to the Protestant faith. These people who offered food in return for conversion were known as soupers. A Protestant missionary group was established on Achill Island in order to convert as many people as possible. The group chose this Island because of the severity of destitution of its inhabitants. It was the intention of the proselytisers to make use of the economic situation so that they could work out their influence upon the people:

> It was impossible not to appreciate the magnanimity of the poor, miserable, utterly destitute and absolutely starving inhabitants of Achill, who were at the time of our visit enduring privations at which humanity shudders, and to know that by walking a couple of miles and professing to change their religion they would have been instantly supplied with food, clothes and lodging[16].

It is worth noting that the Protestant proselytising efforts were met with strong opposition among the Catholic clergy. A Catholic curate in Co. Galway, William Flannelly, described Protestant proselytism as an "impious crusade"[17]. He indicated that Protestantism gained grounds due to the dilapidated economic conditions. Protestant priests offered food and clothes to the "naked and starved"[18] in return for changing their religion. The opposition to souperism also came from an influential member of the Protestant group in Ireland. Dr Richard Whately, the Protestant Archbishop of Dublin, highly condemned the way in which food was used as a means of converting the paupers[19].

The scene of the soup kitchen in the film provided a good description of the act of souperism and its context. It showed a group of proselytisers urging the paupers to renounce to Catholicism in return for a bowl of free soup. It also showed a group of Catholics standing in front of the soup kitchen in order to prevent the paupers from accepting to be converted to Protestantism. Feeney was portrayed as an intruder who disturbed

the conversion process since the paupers were impatiently waiting for the end of the conversion ritual to be allowed to eat. Unlike the rest of Irish, Feeney broke the rules and started eating before the end of the conversion service. He also angrily threw the proselytisers outside the soup kitchen to allow paupers to eat the soup without having to be converted to Catholicism.

Additionally, the film *Black'47* made reference to the Young Ireland movement which preached violence in its opposition to the Act of Union of 1800. The film started with Hannah, an investigator at the Irish Constabulary, asking questions to one of the members of the Young Ireland movement. The scene showed the extent to which the Young Ireland members were hated by the British authorities. Being very angry at the refusal of the Young Irelander to cooperate, Hannah got carried away and strangled him to death.

It is worth noting that the Young Ireland movement was not the only nationalist group that existed in the Famine years. The key leaders of the movement withdrew from the Repeal Association of Daniel O'Connel in 1845 to found a new organisation which called for a rebellion against the English. While the Repeal Association defended the Catholic interests, the Young Ireland movement was an inclusive organisation that was able to mobilise people from different backgrounds including Catholics and Protestants[20].

In 1847, the Young Ireland movement leaders made significant efforts to arm the different clubs throughout the country to prepare for the rebellion of 1848. More importantly, the British government of the time was aware of the threat that Young Ireland represented. A year later, the British PM, Lord John Russell, informed the MPs in the British parliament about the extent of the Young Ireland's preparations for a rebellion. Though Russell severely condemned the preparations for a rebellion, he acknowledged the fact that the failure of the system of public charity helped the Young Irelanders to strengthen their movement:

> the imperfections of which naturally belong to any plan of endeavouring by artificial means to feed those who are deprived of their ordinary subsistence-

> afforded to those who were looking to the separation of Ireland from this country the means of furthering their objects, and of exciting the passions of the people against this country[21].

Despite Russell's awareness of the need to feed the Irish paupers, he responded to the Young Ireland's preparations by presenting a bill in the parliament enabling the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to arrest all those who were suspected of conspiring against the government and the monarch[22]. In fact, the interrogation of the Young Ireland member in the film reflected the atmosphere of violence which was prevalent in the Famine years. Although Hannah was jailed as he strangled to death the Young Ireland member, hazardous arrests were made legal in order to suppress the revolutionaries against the British government. The atmosphere of violence was outlined from the very start of the film as the narrator stated: "the country continued to choke under the rule of the British Empire".

The film referred to one of the highly debated issues related to the Famine years which is food exports. While trying to find Feeney, Pope, Hannah and the English private Hobson accompanied with the Irish translator Conneely went to Lord Kilmichael's estate as they reasoned that Feeney might kill the landlord who evicted his family. Kilmichael was guarded by a group of policemen headed by Sergeant Fitzgibbon.

When the starving paupers overcrowded in front of the gate of Lord Kilmichael's estate, Hobson threatened a policeman while ordering him to open the gate for them. However, his attempt to let the paupers in through the guarded gate cost him his life as he was shot dead by Fitzgibbon and the police. After that, the landlord insisted on accompanying his crop to the railway station to be shipped abroad.

Scholarly research and the archives of the period show that food exports continued at the height of the Famine. The failure of the potato crop for the third consecutive year in 1847 combined with the inadequate relief policy of the British government resulted in the

mass starvation of the Irish. Though thousands of paupers died of starvation, the British government continued to import food from Ireland. Irish exports to England fed about two million people while the Irish were left to die of starvation.

Irish contemporaries condemned the government's policy of political economy which ascribed importance to the principle of non-interference over the urgent need to feed the Irish people. John Mitchel, a political prisoner and a radical member of Young Ireland, stated in his books *Jail Journal of Five Years in British Prison and The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps*) that the British government deliberately wanted to get rid of the Irish by depriving them of the agricultural produce of their country while there was an urgent need for it. He also ascribed the policy of non-interference to the fact that British politicians believed that Ireland was overpopulated. He also argued that the Famine helped the staunchest supporters of the principle of non-interference to achieve their objective of population reduction in Ireland:

> But the potato blight, and consequent famine, placed in the hands of the British government an engine of State by which they were eventually enabled to clear off, not a million, but two million and a half, of the "surplus population"—to "preserve law and order" in Ireland (what they call law and order), and to maintain the " integrity of the Empire" for this time. It was in the winter of 1846-47 that proceedings began to be taken in a business-like manner—(and in a business-like manner I shall relate them)—for the Last Conquest of Ireland, (Perhaps).[23]

The statement above shows the extent to which the Malthusian population thesis largely influenced the British politicians of the time. In Fact, Thomas Malthus argued that the unchecked population growth would inevitably lead to a Famine as food would not be available to everyone.

In *Black'47,* the conversation between the captain and the correspondent of *The Oxford Independent* in the train showed that the English blamed the backwardness of the economy and the Famine on the overdependence of the Irish on a single item of food, the

potatoes. Though the journalist ascribed the Famine to the successive crop failures, the captain stated that the Irish starved because of their overdependence on the potato crop and the fecklessness of their character. Accordingly, the film reconstructed the debate over the issue of accountability which was prevalent in the Famine years. The fact that the British politicians of the time blamed the Famine mostly on the character of the Irish people provided an excuse for inaction.

More importantly, food exports represented the main argument of nationalist historians. Cecil Woodham-Smith's book*, The Great Hunger*, was the best-seller of Irish history books in the 1990s due to the fact that it holds the British government of the time accountable for the mass mortality of the Irish. Woodham-Smith also condemns the decision of the British government to carry on the importation of food from Ireland during the Famine years:

> In the long and troubled history of England and Ireland no issue has provoked so much anger or so embittered relations between the two countries as the indisputable fact that huge quantities of food were exported from Ireland to England throughout the period when the people of Ireland were dying of starvation.[24]

Apart from criticizing the British government's decision to keep exports from Ireland, Woodham-Smith ascribes the deaths from starvation of the Irish to both the landlords and the British politicians of the time. Though she argues that the prevention of food exports could not have provided a radical solution to the Famine as the exported food items were not part of the Irish diet, she argues that the Irish could have benefitted from their homegrown food if there had been a political will for that[25].

Additionally, the film shed light on the hegemonic nature of Anglo-Irish relations in the nineteenth-century. Indeed, many English contemporaries viewed the Irish Celts as being inferior to the Anglo-Saxon race. Lord Kilmichael called the Gaelic "aboriginal gibberish" and stated that he dreamt of a time when the Irish people would be "as rare a sight as a Red Indian in Manhattan".

Kilmichael's attitude towards the Irish reflected the predominant prejudice against the Irish who were perceived as subhuman beings. Despite the fact that Ireland became part of the UK after signing the Act of Union in 1800, the Irish were perceived as inferior partners whose race and way of life were inferior to the Anglo-Saxon race and English way of life. The fate of the Irish in Ireland was exactly like one of the Indians in America. Both of them had a legitimate right for the land and a shared oppressor who perceived Protestantism as being superior to all forms of religious practices. Moreover, both of them were perceived as obstacles to progress.

Lord Kilmichael's hate of the Irish was echoed in the English magazines of the time such as *The Punch* whose cartoons showed an intentional portrayal of the Irish as being animal-like beings in need of the English civilising principles. The image of the Irish in *The Punch* evolved from as inoffensive peasants dependent upon alcohol to dangerous apes[26].

Part of the English cultural hegemony that the film exposed was the marginalization of the Irish language. In their handling of Irish affairs, English officials denied the Irish the right to speak their mother tongue. The English judge, Bolten, stated to the Irish convict that the language of the court was English. There were also other instances when the Irish paupers were asked by the English officials to speak English instead of Irish. The film also outlined the idea that the Gaelic language was associated in the 1840s with backwardness and low social status. The Irish peasants were perceived as being culturally inferior as they were unable to speak English.

The film also outlined the need for translators in the instances of communication between the English officials and the Irish. This meant that there was a divide between the central administration in London and the real conditions of Ireland. In fact, the divide led to the deterioration of the conditions in Ireland during the Famine years. While the Famine resulted in the death of a massive number of people who were buried in mass graves as it is shown in the film,

English politicians pursued their ideological objectives believing that they would undertake radical reforms in Ireland.

The Famine years had a significant impact on the Irish linguistic identify since Ireland witnessed radical changes in terms of the Gaelic Irish speaking people. While moderate statistical data provided by the economic historian Cormac O'Grada show that the number of the Irish speaking people was about three million people in the 1840s[27], other studies state that the same number dropped gradually in the post-famine years. It reached 19% of the Irish population a decade after the Famine and 15% in 1871[28]. The decline in the number of the Irish speaking people could be explained by the drop of the Irish population due to the mass flight of the Irish to many destinations including the USA and Britain. The loss of Irish linguistic identity reflected the triumph of Anglo-Saxon culture which dominated all aspects of the British state at that time. The English language gradually gained grounds over the Irish language throughout the nineteenth-century.

FILM'S RECEPTION

The reception of *Black'47* reflected the response of the global viewers to the reconstruction of the Famine events in the year 1847. Given the fact that subject of the Great Irish Famine usually represented a space of ideological struggle between those who held an apologetic attitude towards the role of the British politicians of the time and those who outlined the issue of accountability by holding British politicians responsible for the mass starvation of the Irish, the response to the film was also marked by a divergence of views. Though the reception of the film represented a form of public history, it largely echoed the academic debate over the interpretation of the Irish past.

The Edinburgh head-quartered newspaper, *The Scotsman*, criticized *Black'47* on the ground that it provided a distorted version of the Irish past. It argued that the film's narrative lacked objectivity

as the tragic events of the Irish past have been used to construct a biased version of what happened. It also condemned the overuse of action at the expense of historical accuracy:

> Black 47 on the other hand wants to be the Irish Braveheart. Set against the backdrop of the potato famine and featuring Australian leads and an unashamedly biased view of history, the film manages to turn human tragedy into a gnarly action film[29].

The fact that *The Scotsman* designated the events of the 1840s as being a "potato famine" reflected an ideological attitude towards the role of the British governments of the time. It supported the view that the Great Irish Famine was mainly caused by the failure of the potato crop while avoiding the issue of the British politicians' accountability for the loss of human life during the calamity. *The Scotsman* also took the argument of revisionist historians who dismissed the nationalist narrative as being purely subjective and populist.

Additionally, the journalist of *The Guardian*, Simran Hans, described the film *Black'47* as "a weak revenge" while claiming that its impact on the viewers was limited. She stated that the "caricatured villains lessen the impact of the film's upward punch"[30]. However, 55 out of the 62 online responses to her article disliked its content. Simran's assessment of the film could be better understood in the context of *The Guardian's* editorial line which defends the Unionists in Northern Ireland. Since the film could revive nationalist feelings and pave the ground for the spread of the New IRA, Simran gave the film 2 out 5 stars. Two other journalists of *The Guardian*, Rory Carroll and Lisa O'Carroll, worried about the likelihood of a United Ireland. They argued that the Post-Brexit era could be marked by land grabs of Protestant owners in the style of Zimbabwe seizures. They fueled fears among the Northern Irish Unionists in order to beg the interference of the central government in London[31].

Contrary to *The Guardian*, the North American website, *Irish Central*, held a positive response to *Black'47*. Niall O'Dowd argued

that the film informed the Irish about their own heritage and history. He also stated that the events of the 1840s in Ireland along with the British response to the calamity largely contributed to the globalized nature of the Irish identity:

> It is a must-see movie for those who value their heritage and history. In that dreadful genocide was the seed of the Irish nation that would spread worldwide. By exacting such a price on starving people the British unwittingly ensured their survival as a worldwide diaspora. That is the ultimate irony[32].

O'Dowd's review of the film undoubtedly showed his condemnation of the role of the British politicians of the time who were held responsible for the loss of human life. He also provided a traumatic understanding of the Great Irish Famine which is regarded as one of the major markers of the Irish American identity. Accordingly, he supported a nationalist perception of the Irish past at the core of which was the issue of the British politicians' accountability for what happened in the Famine years. O'Dowd's attitude reflected the views of the *Irish Central* visitors as the film review was shared by 7000 persons[33].

More importantly, *Black'47* brought about an academic response to the reconstruction of the Famine events. In a short article reviewing the film, Emily Mark-FitzGerald argued that *Black'47* combined "the mythic narrative of the Western genre with a nationalist revenge fantasy to satisfying, if not always sophisticated, effect"[34]. Mark-FitzGerald also stated that the film provided an "imagined form of justice" for the "atrocities" of the Famine years. Despite the fact that Young Ireland was founded in 1845, Mark-FitzGerald argued that there was a historical inaccuracy in the film as she believed that the Young Irelanders did not resort to violence until the rebellion of 1848. She stated that the scene of interrogation of the Young Ireland member should not have been included in the film. An examination of the historical records of the time shows that since its foundation the Young Ireland movement was perceived as being radical not only by the standards of the British politicians of the time but also by the standards of Irish nationalists of the Repeal

movement of Daniel O'Connell. Accordingly, the interrogation of the Young Ireland member could fit very well in the context of 1847, which was marked by the preparations of the Young Irelanders for the rebellion a year later.

The journalist and writer Geoffrey Macnab also raised questions on the accuracy of the events presented in the film. He described the film as being an Irish revenge western exactly like Clint Eastwood films. He also stated that the film suffered from many limitations such as the fact that it did not ascribe much importance to the political struggle and economic conditions of the Famine years while focusing on "the lone avenger Feeney and his determination to mete out justice to his family's tormentors"[35]. Instead of focusing on the different forms of injustice inflicted upon the Irish such as forced conversion to Protestantism and the continuation of food exports, the filmmaker, Macnab argued, focused on the heroic journey of Feeney[36].

Regardless of the way in which the film was received by journalists and film critics, Lance Daly and the film producers consulted a wide range of specialists in different fields. Daly even read several books to reach a deep understanding of the context of the 1840s:

> From the time I signed on till when we started shooting, I read maybe seven or eight books on the Famine, but I also had an assistant who was reading, we had a military historian, a political historian, an art historian, and we had the Quinnipiac Famine Museum in Canada, which is the biggest visual archive - they have every newspaper cutting from the time, they've every image, all the paintings. So we had all that and I think we did everything we conceivably could. The historians have been very positive about it.[37]

Though Daly sought to provide a historically correct account of what happened in Ireland during the Famine years, the film engaged the viewers in a debate on how the Famine period should be understood. Undoubtedly, it supported a nationalist understanding of Anglo-Irish relations which held the British government of the

time accountable for the injustice inflicted upon the Irish and the loss of human life from starvation.

Due to the fact that the film portrayed the level of injustice inflicted on the Irish during the Famine years, its reception was associated with Republican thought. One of the film's actors, Stephen Rea, stated at the Berlin premiere that the film caused a sense of shame "We all live with it. We feel a sense of shame about it"[38]. The film certainly supported the view that the history of Anglo-Irish relations was marked by the subjugation of the Irish to the English oppressors. Though Rea was born in a Protestant family, he showed a rejection of unionism. In September 2019, he stated in an RTÉ Radio discussing Brexit that Northern Ireland should join the South instead of being part of the UK. He also showed criticism of the English role in Northern Ireland[39]. He argued that the English never really cared about the Irish. Instead of showing a real interest in Irish affairs, he stated that English politicians only cared about the Irish votes during elections.

Undoubtedly, the film has tried to frame the public understanding of the events of the 1840s through the cultivation of a nationalist historical consciousness that defied the English narrative of Irish history. The nationalist ideological frame of the film ensured exposure of the viewers to an understanding of Anglo-Irish relations in the nineteenth-century as being a period of suffering and oppression inflicted on the Irish by the English colonisers. The film's events of evictions, the murder of those who resisted evictions, the killing of the member of the Young Ireland activist, the deprivation of the paupers of food, the dog eating the flesh of a human bone and the continuation of food exports to England under police protection while the Irish starved represented a cumulative process that sought to guide the viewer's understanding of the past and internalize the nationalist construct of historical consciousness.

Moreover, the gloomy setting of the film of starvation, suffering, barren landscape, dim light, the sight of paupers wearing rags acted as a primary framework that supported the nationalist agenda-

setting. Though Erving Goffman argued that "natural frameworks identify occurrences seen as undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided," purely physical"[40], the primary framework of the film *Black'47* was ideologically driven by a nationalist agenda. All the physical surrounding suggested that the Irish were deliberately left to starve by the English. In fact, the narrator stated, at the beginning of the film, that the history of Anglo-Irish was a history of "death" and "destruction".

Apart from the study of the significance of the film in reinforcing the nationalist narrative of the past which owes its roots to the early nationalist radicals of the 1840s such as John Mitchel, Lance Daly's attempt to leave an alternative narrative of the same period outside the frame of the film seems to be .worth studying. The focus on the scars of the past and the traumatic experience of the Irish Famine discards the revisionist narrative which attempts to forge a different understanding of the Famine years. Unlike the nationalist narrative, revisionists do not hold the British politicians of the time accountable for the mass starvation of the Irish people. They claim to provide an objective version of what happened. The frame constructed by the film director represents one of the alternative forms of understanding and remembering the tragic events of the 1840s in Ireland.

Black'47 has undoubtedly contributed to the debate on an important period in Irish history which is the Great Famine. The way in which the film director, Lance Daly, dealt with the events of 1847 reflected a Nationalist perception of the Irish past which condemned the role of the British politicians of the time. Since the film supported a Nationalist and anti-British version of the past in the post-Brexit context, it supported the Republican view of uniting the North with the South. *Black'47* as a form of public history engaged the global viewers in discovering one of the darkest chapters of Irish history which is the Great Irish Famine. It also provided an opportunity for the Irish in Ireland and abroad with a site of cinematographic memory that transcended the national

borders of Ireland and engaged the public in the process of remembering and reconstructing the history of the calamity.

NOTES

[1] Vincent Bisson, "Historical Film Reception," in *Bringing History to Life through Film: The Art of Cinematic Storytelling*, ed. in Kathryn Anne Morey (UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 143-144.

[2] Thomas Cauvin and Ciaran O'Neill, "Negotiating public history in the Republic of Ireland: collaborative, applied and usable practices for the profession", *Historical Research* 90, no. 250, (November 2017): 810-811.

[3] Ibid, 815.

[4] David Dean, *A Companion to Public History* (USA: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 2.

[5] John Canon O'Rourke, *The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin: Veritas, a reprint of 1874 edition, 1989), 171.

[6] G.P. Gooch, *The Later Correspondence of Lord JohnRussell 1840-1878* (London and New York: Longmans, 1925), 224.

[7] O'Rourke, *The Great Irish Famine*, 171.

[8] Ibid.

[9] British Parliament, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, *Third Series* (Vol XCVII, 9 March 1848), 338.

[10] British Parliament, *Third Series* (Vol XCVII, 9 March 1848), 343.

[11] Mohamed Salah Harzallah, "Accountability and Administrative efficiency: The Administration of the Soup Kitchen Act in Ireland (1847)", *The Historian* 8, no.2 (2010), 91.

[12] Charles Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, 1848, 136.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 177. The unions officially declared *distressed* were Ballina, Ballinrobe, Bantry, Cahirciveen, Carrick-on-Shannon, Castlebar, Castlerea, Clifden, Dingle, Ennistymon, Galway, Glenties, Gort, Kenmare, Kilrush, Mohill, Roscommon, Scariff, Sligo, Swinford, Tuam, Westport.

[15] Commissariat, "Sir R Routh to Mr Trevelyan", *Correspondence Relating to the Measures Adopted for the Relief of Distress in Ireland (Commissariat Series) Second Part* 1847(796), *vol LII (*16 January 1847), 6.

[16] Mr and Mrs Hall, *Ireland: Its Scenery and Character, Vol II* (London: How and Parsons, 1841), 43.

[17] Noel Kissane. *The Irish Famine: A Documentary History* (Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 1995), 86.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Quoted in Helen E. Hatton, *The Largest Amount of Good Quaker Relief in Ireland 1654-1921* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 147.
[20] S. J. Connolly, "The Great Famine and Irish Politics*"*, in *The Great Irish Famine*, ed. Cathal Poiteir, (Dublin, Mercier Press, 1995), 43.
[21] British Parliament, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, Third Series* (Vol C, 22 July 1848), 699.
[22] Ibid
[23] John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (Glasgow: Wasbourne, 1861), 82-83.
[24] Cecil Woodha-Smith, *The Great Hunger* (Great Britain: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), 70.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Mohamed Salah Harzallah. "Cross-Cultural dialogue: The Case of Anglo-Irish Relations in the Victorian Period", *English Studies Series* (2010), 181.
[27] Cormac Ó Grada, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 216.
[28] Erick Falc'Her-Poyroux, "The Great Famine in Ireland" in *La Grande Famine en Irlande 1845-1850*, ed.Yann Bévant(Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Renne, 2014), 225-242.
[29] "Film reviews: The Wife | Redcon-1 | Black 47 | Skate KitchenThe Scotsman", *The Scotsman*, 27 September 2019, https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/film-reviews-wife-redcon-1-black-47-skate-kitchen-572632
[30] Simran Hans, "Black '47 review – weak revenge drama set during the 1847 Irish famine", *The Guardian*, September 30, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com /film/2018/sep/30/black-47-review-lance-daly-irish-potato-famine-revenge-drama
[31] Rory Carroll and Lisa O'Carroll, "Northern Irish unionists fear post-Brexit land grabs", *The Guardian*, July 18, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jul/18/northern-irish-unionists-fear-post-brexit-land-grabs
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[33] Ibid.
[34] Emily Mark-FitzGerald, "Black'47," *History Ireland* 26, no. 3 (May /June 2018): 50
[35] Geoffrey Macnab, "Black '47 review: A rousing, blood-spattered drama set against the Irish famine," *Independent*, September 26, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/black-47-film-review-irish-famine-barry-keoghan-hugo-weaving-a8556141.html
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

[38] Donald Clarke, "Black '47: Brain-twitching Great Irish Famine revenge thriller," *The Irish Times*, September 5, 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/black-47-brain-twitching-great-irish-famine-revenge-thriller-1.3618023

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