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The Trouble of ‘living with others’ - language, community and the politics of belonging

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Abstract

In this article I ask myself the following question: “Rather than try to escape the seemingly awful choice *between* the private and the public, *between* the particular and universal, or *between* justice and freedom, I ask if I simply have the option to *enact* democracy and see ‘what follows’?”. To reach that question I take a path through an account of an empirical problem, an analysis, and then a flipping of my analysis that gently nudges me to the question above. The empirical problem relates to struggles over the legitimacy of the Irish language as a public good, more specifically as the medium for education in an Irish secondary school. In response to this I rehearse a line of argument that analyses the situation in terms of a politics of belonging. However, I then flip my reasoning, questioning its tendency towards ‘master explication’ and the privileged position of the theorist, and instead explore the possibilities offered by an *anarchic* approach. This latter orientation involves a reading against myself through a dialogue with the work of Gert Biesta as he engages with

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Jacques Rancière's concept of *subjectification*. And so, instead of trying to escape (to master?) the awful choice between justice OR freedom, I am led towards the openness of 'what follows?'

Keywords: subjectification, politics of belonging, Jacques Rancière, Gert Biesta, democracy, Gaeltacht, Irish.

Introduction

I remember having a conversation with my daughter. It concerned plans for her end of secondary school examinations. To be honest we were looking at how we could fit in celebrating her 18th birthday that sat in the middle of her exam revision. This apparently personal matter is full of public discourse on contemporary education in the Republic of Ireland. Indeed, you could say that the public flooded our private moment. That, in large part, is the central question in this article: how can such seemingly private matters be issues of public concern? This private moment was flooded by the public because it related to the fact that her secondary school education was conducted through the medium of Irish, a language, as I will discuss later, whose position as a public good was disputed. The question mark that hung heavy over its use as the medium of formal education brought to the surface the way public debate about the language as a public good was organised around a very particular opposition – that of group versus individual rights. This oppositional couplet is often articulated as a zero sum game. As will be shown, the achievement of one set of rights is frequently posed as being to the detriment of the other; that the two cannot co-exist. While our private moment ostensibly dealt with private matters

the shadow of this conflict of rights always lay across such conversations. So, a harmless discussion about birthday parties reverberated with disputes over the meaning of belonging in and to a region whose official public language was Irish but whose actual *lingua franca* was English, where the public legitimacy of Irish was disputed and English was variously portrayed as a neutral medium of belonging or a threat to authentic identity.

I begin with a particular and painful aporetic event that ripped my daughter's secondary education from that of private contemplation into public, political theatre. I use the term *aporia* deliberately here because I want to attend to the way the transformation of private issues into public problems, as Mills would put it, involves confrontation of an impasse, a moment of 'undecidability' (Horwitz, 2002). I argue that this moment forced upon me a ready-made political topography, of defined subject positions with which I was supposed to identify. I go on to build on the concept of 'throwntogetherness' (Massey, 2004) by linking it to Roger Brubaker's articulation of a politics of belonging (Brubaker, 2010) as the conceptual framing of the cultural politics surrounding Irish-medium education. I examine this in terms of three dimensions - individual versus group rights; public versus private language; and de-territorialised versus territorialised language. In the second part of the paper I rework this framing of a politics of belonging in relation to Gert Biesta's notion of civic learning as 'subjectification' (Biesta, 2011). In doing so I endeavour to engage in a discussion with Biesta as he enters into discussion with Jacques Rancière. I explore the way the cultural politics of language in the empirical setting can be interpreted using Biesta's approach. I conclude with a question. Rather than try

to escape the aporia, the seemingly awful choice *between* the private and the public, *between* the particular and universal, or *between* justice and freedom, I ask if I simply have the option to *enact* democracy and see 'what follows'?

Being hailed to the struggle

Let me step back a moment. Let me go back to a moment of 'decision' that was no decision at all, at least at first. This non-decision was one that many parents face, but which increasingly appear unable (or not allowed) to make unknowingly. That is, choice of school. And there you have some of the public problem I will refer to - 'choice', for initially there was no 'choice' to be made. We lived in a certain location. The nearest town held the secondary school of the region. What 'choice' was there? The school would provide a 'comprehensive' experience since its population was drawn from across social divisions. The small family farmer was as likely to send their daughter there as the local doctor and academic. Other alternatives required traveling some distance, especially if you wanted your children to experience something of the particular character of our local secondary school. And then there was the political, ethical habitus that led my partner and myself to approach 'choice' as no choice, as not needing a moment of 'choosing', as assuming that the comprehensive environment of the local school would be good enough for our first-born. This transformation from seeming non-decision to aporetic event not only forced a discourse of 'choice' upon us, forced a sense of undecidability, but also called me to actively engage with a public politics, to be hailed, as it were, into a seemingly ready-made confrontation between 'tradition' and 'modernity', between 'backward

conservatism' and 'progress'. In being hailed I was also located in subject positions that were uncomfortable.

The following newspaper pieces serve to illustrate the political topography, on which the legitimate positions of political subjectivity were marked,

Language barriers - Irish at the expense of education?

IT HAS been suggested that there are about 200 languages spoken in Ireland today. Even if the figure were half that you would have to wonder if Irish remains in the, say, top three spoken languages in the country. This despite generations of Irish people being force-fed the language at school and government programmes designed to rejuvenate the language. Most of these initiatives have failed as each passing census records that fewer and fewer people describe themselves as competent Irish speakers. Though the number of people using the language has been in decline for centuries those who love it and make it a central part of their daily lives, those who use it to animate their culture, cherish it with deep loyalty and determination. Nobody would wish to do anything other than encourage that love but the Ireland of 2007 cannot tolerate exclusion based on race, religion, nationality, gender or language, even if it is Irish. For that reason the position adopted by Pobal Scoil Chorca Dhuibhne in Dingle, that it will not teach through any language other than Irish, is wrong...The intransigence shown at Pobal Scoil Chorca Dhuibhne shows a meanness of spirit not usually associated with our education system or the people of that wonderful part of the world. The school has set itself up as a kind of

Finsbury Park Mosque by the sea, where cultural intransigence and exclusion is advanced as a group claiming what it perceives to be their rights. (Irish Examiner, 2007)

Rights to an education through Irish

A chara, I am concerned that if the High Court action succeeds against Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne's Irish language policy later this month it will undermine the right of Gaeltacht children to an education through Irish in West Kerry. Some parents want their children educated through English and that is their choice, but it should not replace the right of Gaeltacht children to an Irish language education. With two public secondary schools already in existence in West Kerry, the Pobalscoil that teaches through Irish and one in Castlegregory that teaches through English, that choice is catered for. The language of instruction and the language of communication are both vital to Gaeltacht schools. If two languages are used for instruction, the dominant, stronger language will become the language of communication. A bilingual policy in Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne would change the language of communication between students and their teachers to English, giving way to a Gaeltacht school run through English, with some subjects taught through Irish.

Inconceivable as it may seem, while children in Dublin, Cork and Belfast enjoy top quality post-primary education through Irish this High Court action could end up destroying Irish language education in the Kerry Gaeltacht. (Ó hEartáin, 2009)

The first piece is an extract from an editorial in the national Irish Examiner newspaper whilst the second is a letter in the regional The Kerryman newspaper. In these two short pieces the terms of political socialisation are set - “cultural intransigence and exclusion’ and ‘the ‘right of Gaeltacht children to an education through Irish’, ‘the Ireland of 2007 cannot tolerate exclusion’ and ‘The language of instruction and the language of communication are both vital to Gaeltacht schools’. Both refer specifically to a case taken to the Irish High court by a group of parents whose children attended the community secondary school in the town of Dingle, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne (PCD), in County Kerry, South West Ireland. The case centred on their objection to the school’s policy of conducting its business and instruction through the medium of Irish. Were Ireland a country where Irish was the culturally assumed language of public exchange I am sure the parameters of political debate would be different. But this is a historically constituted society where the Irish language has been rooted in the claim of political sovereignty from a colonial power whose language of dominance was English. Despite this rooting, this linking of cultural and political nationalism, English has remained the *lingua franca*. Objectively then we have state policy that promotes Irish as the first language of the state, largely through the medium of the education system, but where only a minority of the population use it as a language of interaction outside the education system, even in Dingle which has one of the highest concentrations of Irish speakers. It is in this context that the Gaeltacht emerged as a linguistically defined region, simultaneously a linguistic reservation, an ‘archive’ of belonging (Bhabha, 1994), and a spring

from which Irish would flourish as a truly national language (Warren, 2012). This situation is intensified by demographic changes in the Irish population with an increase in EU migration to Ireland (particularly from the new Accession states post-2004) and in-migration of non-Irish speaking families into the Gaeltacht regions, including West Kerry (Ó Giollagáin et al, 2007). This is the context within which the High Court case emerged. The court case was the culmination of a campaign of opposition to the school's Irish language policy by an organisation called the Concerned Parents of Chorca Dhuibhne (CPCD) that just preceded the actual opening of the new school.

While the issue taken by itself is worthy of attention in terms of what it raises about language planning and revival strategies, it is the nature of the cultural politics it represents that is of concern here since it indexes fundamental issues of belonging and the defining of political subjectivities. The editorial piece above gathers together a number of separate elements into a single narrative - linguistic and cultural diversity, language planning and the status of Irish, and the teaching of Irish in schools. The piece reflects survey evidence that while Irish people value the language this does not translate into its use as a daily medium of living (Ó Riagáin 1997; Ó Giollagáin, Mac Donnacha et al. 2007). It has sentimental and symbolic but little functional value. The privileging of Irish is depicted as antithetical to diversity in the modern world. Most startling of all though is the way the editorial portrays the school's language policy as similar to the Muslim radicalism associated with the mosque in Finsbury Park, London. This immediately identifies those promoting the Irish language with the 'war on terror' since the Finsbury Park mosque was linked to Al Qaeda activity,

specifically Richard Reid (the ‘shoe bomber’) and Zacarias Moussaoui, as well as a number of people linked to the Beslan school hostage crisis in Russia in 2004, and of course the radical Islamist preacher Abu Hamza al-Masri who was jailed in the UK for inciting racial hatred and murder. It is notable that the editorial fails to use the correct Irish spelling of the school’s name in a piece on the Irish language.

If the intolerant promoters of Irish represent one set of subjects in the narrative, the other subjects are non-Irish speakers, particularly migrants for whom English is the vehicle for integration. English then is the language of belonging, the public language of education whereas Irish remains as the private language of those who “cherish it with deep loyalty and determination”. The second piece, a letter written by a spokesperson of a group representing parents supporting the school’s policy provides a different account of belongingness. If the right to education as a public good (and a vehicle for integration) for diverse individuals is mediated through English then in this second piece it is the collective right of a linguistic group that is privileged in the narrative. The language (Irish) and a specific spatial formation (the Gaeltacht) are viewed as necessarily linked and synonymous. Individual choice is accounted for in the proximity of an English medium secondary school. Interestingly the potential dilution of the right of Gaeltacht children to an Irish-medium education is contrasted to the opportunities afforded Irish speaking families in non-Gaeltacht urban centres of Dublin and Cork, reflecting changes in the demographic redistribution of Irish speakers in Ireland (Ó Riagáin, 1997). Whilst not emphasised the inclusion of Belfast as a site of increased opportunities for Irish-medium education is

significant since Belfast is under British jurisdiction suggesting that the Irish language may be safer there than in an Irish state. Key issues run through these two pieces - contestation of Irish as a public language; individual versus group rights to public goods; and the nature of English as a mobile language enabling integration in diverse societies.

We have then, the main themes that animate this article – the constitution of the political where private sentiments become public concerns, the impossibility of political closure, the distinction between political subjectification and identification, democracy as attitude or performance rather than outcome, and democracy as a struggle over meaning.

Microworlds and the politics of belonging

The two very different depictions of Dingle outlined above may be interpreted in terms of ‘truth’, that is we need to decide which representation is correct. But what if Dingle is not a single place but instead can be understood through the concept of ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey, 2005), where Dingle is produced on a moment-to-moment basis, place as always in production, the collision of ‘microworlds [that] find themselves on the same proximate turf’ (Amin, 2004, p.39)? Massey suggests that places are normally made out of the unspectacular interactions between people, ideas and values born out of ‘throwntogetherness’ but sometimes the mundane is disrupted and the private sentiments that might animate people are forced into forms of public politics – *privitas* to *civitas*.

‘Throwntogetherness’ or the collision of ‘microworlds’ suggests an idea of place as liminal rather than fixed, a space where dominant orders of meaning have to seek legitimacy and support to be hegemonic. As will become clear later this resonates with Biesta’s articulation of ‘citizenship-as-practice’. Place, in this sense, is never fixed. The transformation from private to public, from personal thoughts and feelings about the Irish language to the taking of public positions on the school’s language policy, points to the essentially political nature of such orders of meaning. But we should guard against any implication of voluntarism here. Not any order of meaning is possible. The conditions for the mobilisation of any particular set of meanings are framed by the confluence of history, economics and relations of power that have constituted Dingle as a particular kind of place with its own contours, topography and cultural climate. This history will also produce its own ‘politics of belonging’. Rogers Brubaker has analysed the relationship between the formation of nation-states, belonging, ethnicity and migration in modern Europe producing a non-essentialist framework for understanding these different sets of relations (Brubaker, 2004; 2010). For instance, I have drawn on Brubaker’s work to examine the way the modernist Irish nationalist movement deployed an idealised model of the nation-state as constituted by a series of congruences - nation (culture), state (polity), territory, ethnicity and language as part of a ‘nation seeking’ politics and then instituted this in the solidification of the spatial definition of the Gaeltacht and the role of the education system as the key mechanism for linguistic revival (Warren, 2012). Brubaker (Brubaker 2010, p.68) argues that this idealised form of the nation-state continually fails to realise itself, generating ‘both internal and external forms of the politics of belonging’. In other words the nation-state

produces marginality and discrimination in the process of trying to fix its external and internal boundaries, its distinction (cultural as much as political) from other nations as well as its imagined internal homogeneity. Brubaker's work has been particularly concerned with the politics of belonging and ethnicity produced when borders rather than people move (Brubaker, 1996; 2004). His concepts of 'nation seeking' and 'nation making' politics (Brubaker, 2004) have been particularly useful for some of my previous analyses. Here I want to work with his development of the idea of a 'politics of belonging' and how this can help us to understand, in the first instance, the nature of the particular tensions around the Irish language in PCD. Whereas Brubaker develops this idea at the level of the state, following his suggestion I deploy it at the more local level of the school community and its socio-cultural hinterland.

Belonging 'in' or belonging 'to' the state

Brubaker (2010, p.65) makes an important distinction between the politics of belonging 'in' and 'to' the nation-state. This is an analytical distinction whereas the phenomenological experience of belonging (to community, to place, to nation) may involve both aspects as we shall see below. The politics of belonging 'to' the nation-state normally relates to issues of inward migration where questions of formal citizenship and access to public goods are at stake.

Belonging 'in' the nation-state can be understood as applying largely to those who formally are citizens or recognised members of the polity but where there is some doubt or contestation over 'their access to, and enjoyment of, the substantive rights of citizenship, or about their substantive acceptance as full members' and where 'the politics of belonging is not generated by migration, at

least not in any proximate sense, but by various forms of social closure, discrimination, or marginalization.’ (Brubaker 2010, p.64-65). While I will make reference to inward migration to the state my primary focus is on the politics of belonging generated by ‘social closure, discrimination, or marginalization’. I want to do this through a discussion of the three dimensions identified above - individual versus group rights; public versus private language; and de-territorialised versus territorialised language.

Whose rights count?

This conflict between group and individual rights can be seen as central to the dispute around the PCD’s policy. As we see in the letter written to The Kerryman above the language policy of the school and the status of the school as a Gaeltacht school are asserted because of the role of education in the intergenerational transmission of Irish, and of education being central to sustaining the Gaeltacht as a particular linguistic region. Therefore Irish-medium education can be viewed as a public, and not just a private, good. The right to Irish-medium education is seen to accrue to a linguistic community, the right being attached to them as a group and not just as individuals. Against this perspective is asserted the prioritising of individual rights of those seeking an English-medium education. It is not that Irish-medium education is not granted legitimacy (the editorial piece gives recognition to the symbolic and sentimental value of Irish), but its status as the medium of instruction of education as a public good is disputed. In other words Irish is defined as primarily a cultural and therefore a private matter. This is at the heart of liberal arguments against multiculturalism generally and linguistic rights specifically (Barry, 2001). Group rights claims, it

is argued, should not, in a liberal democracy, supersede individual rights. In other words the majority community, in this case English-speakers, should not carry a disproportionate cost for the support of a minority community. The accommodation of group rights, in this case of Irish speakers, has been a feature of the Irish national project since 1922 through the institutionalisation of Irish-speaking Ireland in the form of the Gaeltacht. That is, Irish-speaking Ireland was fixed spatially, separating it increasingly from the majority English-speaking Ireland. As neo-liberal economic models of modernity took hold over the Irish political imagination from the 1950s onwards (O'Hearn, 2003; Ó Croidheáin, 2006; Watson, 2008) the tension between group and individual rights intensified. The status of Irish as a public language justified by reference to the group rights of an imagined Gaeltacht community is the central issue at stake in this dispute.

A public language?

Let me now return to Brubaker's idea of the politics of belonging. In the liberal nation-state belonging is mediated through a rights discourse of citizenship. Brubaker notes that modern conceptions of citizenship in the liberal state arose because of the problematic sense of civic inclusion faced by the working class, racial and national minorities (2010, p.65). The formal inclusion of Irish citizens whose preferred first language is Irish is not in doubt. However, questions have always been raised as to the substantive nature of the rights accruing to them as Irish-speakers. Gaeltacht communities have engaged in periodic campaigns to position Irish as a legitimate public language of the state, often against official intransigence. These campaigns have brought into being a series of national

institutions such as Irish language radio and television stations (Ó Thuathaigh, 2008; Watson, 2008). More recently the civic rights of Irish speakers as Irish speakers rather than simply inhabitants of a Gaeltacht has been instituted in the Official Languages Act 2003. One of significant features of this act is that it positively promotes Irish as a language of interaction between the state and its citizens whereby any citizen who communicates with a state body through the medium of Irish has the positive right to be dealt with by state bodies through Irish. However, this right is framed in terms of individuals' interactions with the state and not primarily as part of a linguistic group. Of interest is that the traditional Gaeltacht and Irish language organisations did not play a primary role in mobilising political support for this legislation (Rigg, Ó Laoire, & Georgiou, 2009). In a sense then the fact that Irish speakers and Gaeltacht communities have had to fight for civic inclusion as Irish-speakers indicates the degree of political and cultural, as well as economic, marginality that they have suffered. Using Brubaker's terminology there has always been a politics of belonging 'in' the state beyond symbolic commitments.

Territorialised language

While there is a particular history to the emergence of English as the majority language in Ireland, and that this is intimately related to British colonialism, it cannot be reduced to a simplistic notion of linguistic imperialism (see Blommaert, 2010, pp.43-47 for a discussion of the limitations of the linguistic imperialism perspective). Tony Crowley (2005) offers an interesting historical perspective on the complex and often contradictory relationship between Irish, colonial power, and emergent national consciousness. Of importance here

though is the way language is positioned in the competing political discourses as reflected in the two newspaper pieces at the beginning of this article. Before proceeding I need to make the point that Irish or English are not really considered as languages in the normal sense. The struggle over legitimacy is not a struggle over which is the better language linguistically but rather the symbolic and discursive function of the languages within different politics of belonging. For instance it is important to consider that Irish in the context of the school functions emblematically rather than linguistically. The Irish required to access learning in the Irish medium instruction of the school does not equip young people with the vernacular form of Irish of the locality. Unless a young person is already competent in the local vernacular they are unlikely to 'pass' as a 'local'. Their pronunciation, vocabulary and linguistic style will mark them as exterior to the local form of Irish. There are different kinds of Irish that function differently. Belonging to the particular linguistic community in this Gaeltacht requires competence in the local vernacular. While Irish-medium education is articulated as a necessary mechanism for linguistic revival and intergenerational transmission this can only work at an abstract level of the nation since the local vernacular is not the medium of instruction and examination. In one sense the local vernacular is partly being displaced not just by English but also by a standardised form of Irish – 'book Irish'. Irish in the context of the school works therefore at two different scales - at a national scale as part of a national(ist) project of linguistic revival; and a local scale of the vernacular locating or fixing people to a particular linguistic space (West Kerry). Similarly we can see English as indexing access to a globalised world within which Irish is perceived to have little instrumental value (in accessing jobs in a context of economic insecurity

and migration). Irish is seen as a territorialised language fixing people to a restricted linguistic space. In contrast English becomes de-territorialised, a mobile resource equally accessible and useable to any individual. The editorial piece, for instance, makes reference to the role of English as the medium for the integration of migrants.

As Jan Blommaert (2010, p.46) notes,

‘the choice of English or French rather than indigenous languages in education is at the grassroots level often mediated by means of discourses of ‘getting out of here’ and towards particular centres - metropolitan areas - where upward mobility at least looks possible’.

He relates this to the unequal distribution of power and material resources where for people in real contexts of social and or economic marginality promotion of ‘local’ languages as public goods can feel that this will lock them into the marginalised space. But Blommaert alerts us to the fact that when thinking of issues of linguistic inequality we need to think of this as ‘organized around concrete resources, not around languages in general’ (47). There will necessarily be tension around English as a mobile resource and as an ideological language, as a mobile resource means more than acquiring a general competence. Blommaert, in using the language of linguistic resources, is referring to linguistic registers, varieties and genres of English (or other languages). Different forms of English are more or less de-territorialised. Only the most privileged forms of English associated with a globalised elite are truly mobile. Despite the rhetorical claim for English medium education enabling

access to a globalised world of work and culture the different users of English in Dingle will have very different repertoires of English, not all of which would enable equal access to privileged social spaces or economic resources. Similarly not all Irish-speakers, by virtue of being Irish-speakers, will be denied access to privileged forms of English.

The politics of belonging and citizenship as subjectification

In the brief depiction of the cultural politics of language that arose in Dingle I suggest that it was structured around a conflict between two opposing conceptions of rights where the achievement of one set of rights appeared to negate the other set of rights. In other words, conceptualising bilingualism without accounting for the historical production of Irish as a threatened language could relegate Irish to the private domain because of the cultural power of English. But this still leaves unresolved the relationship between Irish and how to belong in a region that has undergone demographic and cultural change and where attachment to Irish as a public language has long been disputed. If the relationship between cultural identity and language, and language and place is contingent, how can you construct a politics of belonging? The concept of 'throwntogetherness' means that politics is not mediated through such binaries as modern and traditional, particular and cosmopolitan, rural and metropolis, private and public. Instead, concepts such as 'belonging' can be opened up to interrogation and the nature of what it is to belong in places such as Dingle can become the focus of political debate. Therefore the opposition between an Irish-medium education and the installation of an English stream in the school could be reconfigured into a debate over whether increased diversity

necessitated the continued threat to Irish as a viable community language; how might new Irish speakers relate to the community of traditional Irish speakers; can the possession of Irish be considered an aspect of cosmopolitan identity?

Order and the anarchic challenge

So, how does this relate to discussions about democratic citizenship and civic learning? Gert Biesta (2011) is concerned with the way people learn citizenship ‘through the processes and practices that make up the everyday lives of children, young people, and adults’ (1) contrasting this to the contemporary move towards the formal teaching of citizenship. This distinction plays out at different levels of analysis and can be seen to frame differences between citizenship as institutionalised in particular political orders or in acts of supposition, between politics as *archic* and *anarchic* (Biesta, 2011). The idea of citizenship that animates Biesta’s thinking is one that is always focused on ‘democracy and democratic politics’ (2) and consequently on the ways private sentiment is translated into public issues. His concern is less with the way people are socialised into democratic engagement and more with the conditions for the constitution of democratic subjectivities, particularly through the everyday practices of democratic engagement (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). The dispute over the school’s language policy can be viewed as an instance of the disruption of habituated practice whereby private sentiments are translated into public issues so constituting the possibility of a democratic politics and the constitution of democratic subjectivities. However, Biesta, drawing on the theoretical work of Jacques Rancière, presents a challenge to the analysis that I have so far put forward. My analyses have operated within the general framework of critical

theory. Indeed, Brubaker's work above has built upon social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu. Biesta (2010a) points out that such philosophical humanism rests upon the assertion that the role of theory is to disclose the operation of power that produces inequality. This rests upon a distinction between surface and substratum, between appearance and a reality that is hidden, and which requires a special class of person (master) to reveal the hidden dimension (Rancière, 2006). Equality is therefore an *outcome* of such master explication. My concern to demonstrate the construction of Irish as a subordinate language could be viewed as situating myself as a 'master explicator'. Also, influenced by the work of Chantal Mouffe (1993; 2005) I have tended towards an emphasis on the *archic* character of politics as requiring a certain stable order of meaning.

For subjectification

A central motif of Biesta's argument is the distinction between education as *socialisation* or *identification* and *subjectification* (Biesta, 2007; 2008; 2010a). In his discussion of citizenship education, for instance, Biesta views this as operating in terms of bringing young people into a set of existing subject positions, captured by the category of 'citizen' (Biesta, 2010a, p. 47; Lawy & Biesta, 2006), socialising young people into an existing order of meaning. For Rancière this constitutes 'impossible identifications' (Rancière, 1992, p. 62) since nobody can fully inhabit such global categories. This is contrasted with *subjectification*. If *socialisation* implies taking up subject positions in an existing order of meaning, of being hailed, *subjectification* implies a political or social order as contingent. This has implications for imagining citizenship since you are no longer able to think of this as involving identification with the category of

'citizen'. Instead, Biesta, articulating Rancière's position, argues that citizenship is in fact a 'claim' or 'opinion' or 'supposition', an 'axiom'. Echoing Rancière's discussion in his famous work 'The Ignorant Schoolmaster' Biesta argues for democracy understood as 'citizenship-as-practice'. By this he doesn't just mean 'learning-by-doing' but that citizenship is enacted, the claim of citizenship is "...a process in and through which political subjectivity is established and comes into existence or, to be more precise, a process through which new ways of doing and being come into existence" (Biesta, 2011, p. 150). This points towards Rancière's assertion that it is not the category of citizen that forms the ground of equality but 'what follows' from making claim to such a category (Rancière, 1992, p. 60). By staking a claim to the category of citizen in a context where the implications of that are unsettled or disputed you both signal *identification* with the subject position of 'citizen' and disruption of the order of meaning, a challenge to what can be considered sensible. This is because no order of meaning, no political or social order can fully enclose the range of possible ways of being and doing, there is always the possibility of something following the claim to equality that escapes the dominant distribution of the sensible.

And 'what follows'?

The Irish language has been caught up in assertions of an independent and authentic Irish citizenship defined in opposition to British colonial rule. Education as a vehicle for cultivating new citizens as part of a claim of nationhood would therefore conceive the role of language as part of the journey to citizen status. Biesta poses the idea of citizenship as 'ongoing practice' (Lawy & Biesta, 2006, p. 43). This approach is better able to deal with a world of

difference than citizenship as *socialization*, as 'citizenship-as-achievement'. If citizenship-as-practice is understood as involving a radical openness, it places attention on citizenship as an act, as something that is learned from engagement with the things that matter in our lives. The campaigns for and against the language policy can be re-conceived as a positive example of civic learning. However, the outcome of this learning is open, it is something experienced in the 'throwntogetherness' of multicultural living and a world of difference. Both groups, those for and against the school's language policy, can be seen as seeking to socialise people into existing orders of meaning – one an identification with a linguistic community, the other that of the culture of measurement (Biesta, 2008) and its attendant formation of human capital.

Given the different linguistic orders I have alluded to above - not all Englishes are of equal cultural worth and 'school Irish' does not socialise young people into a vernacular culture - socialisation does not appear to function well for either set of values. Alternatively, we could view the groups as engaged in processes of *subjectification*. Those supporting the school's policy were identifying with a category that lay outside the hegemonic identity of modern globalised Ireland. That is, the dominant cultural tendency to frame Irish as a 'dead' language almost forces upon some the need to politically identify with the category of Irish language activist (as decried in the newspaper editorial at the beginning of this article); identification as a response to a denial of an authenticity by an 'other' (government, globalization, etc.) (see Rancière, 1992). Similarly, those working against the school's policy were resisting what they saw as their exclusion, not from the category of Irish (since there was never a unifying category for these

individuals) but from the category of 'people living in the Gaeltacht'. So, the struggle is not a contest between identities but a contest over the *topos* of an argument, a struggle over the meaning of belonging, of who is a citizen in this *civitas*.

Some concluding remarks

Andrea Baumeister (2000) notes that in the face of increasing demands from national and ethnic minorities liberal democratic states struggle to work out the best way of accommodating demands for group recognition without undermining individual liberty. The tensions surrounding the school's policy brings to the fore liberal democracy's problematic relation with diversity, the citizen, with who can be presumed to speak (Biesta, 2010b; Säfström, 2010). This is where the public politics of belonging floods the private moment between father and daughter. As Baumeister (2000) clearly argues, if at the heart of a liberal understanding of citizenship (belonging) is the idea of the abstract, undifferentiated, autonomous individual who can attract rights on the basis of formal equality, then anything that has the appearance of particularity is excluded from the public domain and relegated to the cultural and therefore the private. Within liberal democratic theory all individuals enjoy equal moral value. Matters of difference, be they religious faith, sexual orientation, ethnicity, are consequently regarded as private matters and should not be the providence of public political concern. We see this in the editorial piece where Irish is essentially privatised, a quality of personal enthusiasm and interest. Therefore, in the face of increasing particularist demands liberal democracies, such as

Ireland, have sought to accommodate these demands so long as they do not undermine individual liberty.

It is at this point that I find myself back at the beginning, at the moment of aporia, of dilemma where the particular (Irish as a private good and parental desire to see their children do well in the world) and the universal (Irish-speakers as demanding collective rights; and the right of 'choice' over medium of education) are juxtaposed (Herzog, 2005). Perhaps the *anarchic* challenge posed by Biesta and Rancière means that it is not necessary to view the struggle over the school's language policy as requiring a move from the particular to the universal; perhaps the transformation of private sentiment into public problem can simply be accepted as inviting an '...uncertain political subjectivity that lacks identification' (Biesta, 2011, p. 145). Both sides of the struggle argued for justice, both required a demand to see 'what follows' when the category of citizen (one who has rights and can seek justice) is claimed. But, for me, I found myself in the midst of Camus' aporia, of the impossible synthesis between justice and freedom. Therefore, is there only one alternative left for me, not to aspire to justice OR freedom, but to enact them both and see 'what follows'?

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