

Participatory music in the Irish Gaeltacht

Éamonn Costello

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Ón gCos go Cluas

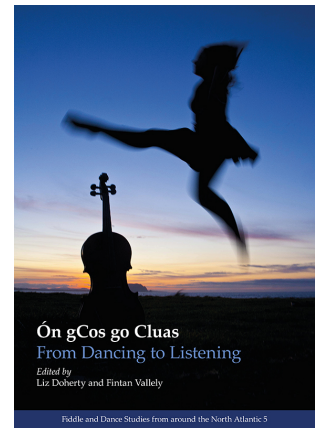
From Dancing to Listening

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 5

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Participatory music in an Irish Gaeltacht district

ÉAMONN COSTELLO

The dramatic modernisation that An Cheathrú Rua (Carraroe) in the Conamara Gaeltacht¹ has experienced from the mid-twentieth century onwards, has brought about a state of technologically-induced social isolation² amongst the local population. This feeling of social isolation is mirrored by the loudness of Conamara Country and Western (CC&W) performances, which inhibit verbal communication and therefore community bonding. In the past in Carraroe, the performance of *sean-nós*³ and Irish traditional music was a fully participatory, and a highly intimate event. As such, it helped to reinforce the community bonds essential for sustaining the area's economy which, up until the early 1960s, was a co-operative labour system. The introduction of industry to Carraroe brought an end to this system, and, by extension, *sean-nós* lost its function in the community. To compound matters, due to the influence of Romantic nationalism, *sean-nós* is widely seen as an index of an idealised primitive Gaeltacht, which bears little resemblance to contemporary Gaeltacht life. CC&W music sung in Irish/Gaelic⁴ has become the dominant music genre of the area, partly because the cosmopolitan nature of CC&W subverts the primitive image of the Gaeltacht fostered by Romantic revivalists. Since Carraroe is one of Conamara's major socialising hubs, it is, in my opinion, a synecdoche for the Conamara Gaeltacht.

An Cheathrú Rua / Carraroe

In order to fully understand the relationship people in Carraroe have with traditional music and with CC&W, we need to briefly discuss some aspects of the area's history and demography. The Galway Gaeltacht of Conamara has a population of 40,052, which is 47% of the total Gaeltacht population nationally.⁵ However, during the Celtic Tiger years, the suburbs of Galway city (consisting mainly of English language speakers) extended out into the Conamara Gaeltacht district, and it is estimated that today about 12,000 of the Galway Gaeltacht population lives in the city's environs. The County Galway Gaeltacht covers a geographical area of 1,255 square kilometres, which is 26% of the total national Gaeltacht land area. The largest settlement areas in this Gaeltacht district are An Spidéal (Spiddal) and An Cheathrú Rua (Carraroe). Carraroe village lies approximately 45km west of Galway City in the centre of a peninsula that overlooks Casla Bay to the east and Great-man's Bay to the west (Cuan an Fhir Mhóir). There are three public houses, two hotels, one nightclub,

and numerous bed and breakfasts in the village. It also has a primary and a secondary school, the latter serving many of the surrounding town-lands. The National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) runs a number of third-level outreach education courses from Áras Mháirtín Uí Chadhin⁶ in the village, and both Radió na Gaeltacht⁷ (the National Irish-language radio station) and TG4⁸ (the National Irish-language television station) are based nearby, as are a number of Údaras na Gaeltachta⁹ industrial estates. Over the past forty years Carraroe has gone from being predominately a pre-industrial economy to one which is technologically advanced, and highly specialised. The main industries in the area today are in: pharmaceuticals, electronics, and multi-media.

Technological advancement and industry, within a capitalist framework, has brought innumerable benefits to the Carraroe area, but it has also contributed to the fragmentation of the areas' sense of community. Up until the mid-1960s, the vast majority of people in Carraroe made their living from a mixture of small scale farming, inshore fishing, and turf and seaweed harvesting.¹⁰ The labour intensive nature of these types of work meant that a co-operative labour system – known as *meitheal* – was the norm in Conamara (as it was in much of rural Ireland). *Meitheal* meant that neighbours would help one another with harvesting and other farm work. Although the practice is generally viewed as a mutual exchange of labour, it also embodies a strong element of civic-responsibility and charity. Thus, members of the Carraroe community who were unable to contribute to a *meitheal* themselves because of illness or infirmity, would nevertheless receive aid at harvest time from their neighbours. By its very nature, *meitheal* depends upon and reinforces strong feelings of community belonging. In the past, music-making in Carraroe also functioned to deepen the sense of belonging, and as such it was an important component of *meitheal*.

The pub culture we associate with contemporary Ireland is a relatively new phenomenon. In the past, Carraroe public houses were almost exclusively patronised by *bádóirí* (boatmen), the men who sailed the Galway hookers (inshore sailing vessels that ferried goods such as turf, wood, flour, kelp, and salt into and out of Conamara). For the *bádóir*, the public house was the place to find work or a crew. Therefore, prior to the 1950s, the Carraroe public house was not just a location for socialising, but an extension of the male working world. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the people of Carraroe did not have the disposable income to spend on luxury items, such as alcohol. Rather, they drank *póitín*, an illegal drink brewed and distilled locally. Since it was tax free, it cost much less than the excise-regulated alcohol sold in public houses. The illegal status of *póitín* meant that it could not be consumed in public. This, combined with the fact that public-houses were generally not frequented by women, meant socialising with alcohol in Carraroe was a domestic affair. Yet certain country dwellings were known as 'open-houses' because neighbours and members of the wider community would visit these private houses on certain nights to dance, sing and musick¹¹ together. These gatherings were referred to locally as *timanaí* (times), and also involved women. *Timanaí* forged amongst those in attendance a strong sense of togetherness, elemental to a culture dependent on *meitheal*. The Irish Public Hall Act of 1935 made dances in such country houses illegal, and had a significant effect on vernacular music in Carraroe, and in Ireland generally, but the reasons for the waning of *sean-nós* and traditional music in Carraroe are more complex. I believe that the Carraroe

populace turned away from *sean-nós* and traditional music as a reaction to the prescriptive discourse of Irish Romantic cultural nationalists, who used *sean-nós* as a vehicle for their own political agenda (which I will address later in this paper). Also, since *sean-nós* and traditional music were part of a cultural formation centred on the *meitheal*, they went into decline along with it.

The industrialisation of the Carraroe area meant that *meitheal* was no longer an essential part of Carraroe life. Consequently, the strong sense of community belonging and civic responsibility fundamental to *meitheal* was also no longer essential. It is important to note that the introduction of industry to Carraroe and Conamara did not in any way destroy some kind of prelapsarian idyllic community. Life in Conamara, and on the Aran Islands, during the nineteenth and for much of twentieth century was one of extreme hardship and poverty. From the mid-nineteenth century until the 1980s the area was socially depleted by emigration. The development of industry in Conamara not only brought a better standard of living to Carraroe, it also helped to redress a sense of inferiority felt by many in the area, which was fuelled by abject poverty and a dependency on State unemployment benefits.¹² Today, the lifestyle of the average Carraroe inhabitant is more or less the same as that of suburbanites¹³ anywhere in the westernised world. S/he lives in a modern dwelling with every convenience, is heavily car-dependent, and is connected to the wider world through the internet, and other media. Yet Carraroe, and the Gaeltacht generally, still seems to exist in a space between the modern contemporary world and its pre-industrial past, a situation which I believe adds, in no small part, to the disjunction of community in the area, a disjunction that exists, at least partly, because of the construction of the very idea of the Gaeltacht.

Romantic nationalism's construction of the Gaeltacht

Cultural nationalism is the 'nation building' aspect of nationalist movements. It incorporates music and dance as vehicles to unify different groups in order to create a nation.¹⁴ Romanticism is an ideology concerned with recreating the past in the present. Therefore, Romantic Cultural Nationalism is a process of creating a nation based on an imagined past. Irish Romantic Nationalists (Gaelic Revivalists) were inspired by Johann Gottfried von Herder's theory that every language was the expression of a unique culture, and that a culture could only be understood in terms of its language. For Gaelic revivalists the Irish language was regarded as being the fundamental and immutable corner stone of 'authentic' Irishness. Von Herder's theory implies that culture can be learned, but while Irish Romantic Cultural Nationalism accepts this interpretation to a certain extent, fundamentally it takes the view that only the native speaker is truly authentically Irish, because only the truly native speaker thinks in Irish. Gaelic revivalists viewed the native Irish speaker not only as a source for language revival, but as the living remnant of pre-colonial Ireland, an ancient Gaelic culture, unaffected by Anglicisation. Gaelic revivalists changed the meaning of the term Gaeltacht. The term, which originally meant 'the Irishry' or 'native Irish', is now used as a label for the Irish-speaking districts of Ireland.¹⁵ For Gaelic revivalists the Gaeltacht was seen as the ideal template on which contemporary Irishness should be based.¹⁶ However, the marrying of 'authentic' Irishness to specific locales ultimately frames the native Irish speaker as an ethnic group apart from the rest of the Irish population. Although some people

from the Gaeltacht take pride in their status as ‘authentic Gaels’, many resent being so stereotyped as such ‘noble peasants’.

In 1893 a number of prominent Irish intellectuals established Conradh na Gaeilge (the Gaelic League), Ireland’s main Irish cultural nationalist organisation of the twentieth century. The league employed *timirí* (tutor-organisers) and *múinteoirí taisteal* (travelling teachers) to travel to the Gaeltacht districts. Their objective was to ‘educate’ the native speaker as to the value of the Irish language, which was being abandoned by the Gaeltacht community at the time for pragmatic reasons. Revivalists viewed the Gaeltacht as an ancient-Gaelic reservation in an otherwise modern and Anglicised Ireland, and they felt compelled to protect this reservation from becoming modernised. Colonisers often see themselves as parent/protectors to the childlike colonised.¹⁷ As such, the Irish Romantic Movement can be viewed as a continuation of the colonial process that had begun in Ireland many centuries earlier, what Zumthor (1990) calls ‘internal-colonialism’. Many Gaelic revivalists equated modernisation with Anglicisation, which was anathema to the nationalist agenda. More recently, some sections of the Irish language movement have attempted to distance the language from its association with nationalism; instead there has been a concerted effort to vindicate the language both as a live element of Irish society and as an endangered cultural expression of a minority group within Irish society.¹⁸ Yet the Gaeltacht continues to be framed as a ‘reservation’ of ‘authentic Irishness’, albeit a retreating one. Although ideologically opposed to modernising the Gaeltacht, over time, cultural revivalists have come to realise that if there was any hope of preserving the Gaeltacht they needed to tackle the issue of poverty there, and this led to the introduction of industry to the area.

Gaeltacht economy and the Gaelic revival

Numerous initiatives have been enacted over the years, by cultural nationalist organisations and the Irish state, to safeguard the Irish language in Gaeltacht districts, culminating in the formation of *Údaras na Gaeltachta* in 1980. The *Údaras* initiates various employment projects and schemes such as the development of industrial estates in Gaeltacht locales to which various industries have been enticed with attractive grants. With the object of stemming emigration and preserving Gaeltacht culture, these have been the primary catalyst behind Carraroe’s technologically-induced social isolation. In essence they have been the vehicle for the modernisation of the area. Yet, the Gaeltacht is still generally viewed as being of the past, and the Gaeltacht community is widely seen as being responsible for preserving the Irish language and Irishness in general. Even though the Gaeltacht has benefited a great deal financially (from language tourism, enterprise initiatives, and government grants) and, in terms of status, its population has periodically resisted the prescriptive discourse of being ‘of the past’. The emergence of CC&W is one expression of this resistance, as it subverts any idealised image of an ‘authentic’ Gael; it resists the internal-colonialism of Romantic nationalism because it is cosmopolitan popular and modern, in many ways the antithesis of *sean-nós* song.

Musicking in Carraroe

Sean-nós song is considered by some to be the root and foundation stone of Irish traditional instrumental music. The term was first used at the beginning of the twentieth century, by Irish language revivalists, as a label for a style of traditional Irish language song from the Gaeltacht.¹⁹ Language revivalists regard vernacular Irish-language song in two ways. Firstly, because of its language content, it was seen as a vehicle for language revival,²⁰ and secondly, it is widely seen as an aural metaphor for the Gaeltacht and ‘authentic Irishness’. But in addition to Irish-language song, the traditional song repertoire of the Gaeltacht contains numerous English and macaronic songs. Yet language revivalists, such as Conradh na Gaeilge and an t-Oireachtas,²¹ have only considered the Irish-language portion of the Gaeltacht repertoire to be authentically Irish, and so the term ‘*sean-nós*’ functions to differentiate Irish-language song from other forms of vernacular song performed in Ireland, both inside and outside the Gaeltacht districts. *Sean-nós* is generally classified according to region, associated with parts of the following counties which are classified as Gaeltacht areas: Galway, Mayo, Donegal, Waterford, Cork, Meath, and Kerry. Gaelic revivalists thus turned the Gaeltacht into a spatial metaphor for authentic Irishness, and *sean-nós* into an aural metaphor for the Gaeltacht.

‘Authentic’ Irishness, for Gaelic revivalists, is imagined as being the binary opposite to Englishness,²² which is equated with the so-called western art style of singing. Of all the vernacular styles of singing performed in Ireland, Conamara *sean-nós* is widely regarded as being the furthest removed from the western art style, which means that it easily is regarded by revivalists as being the most authentically Irish of all the *sean-nós* styles. The copious use of melismatic ornamentation combined with nasalisation and a stressed voice production process are features which have become somewhat of a stereotype of the Conamara style, and these features have contributed to Conamara *sean-nós*’ privileged position. Indeed, most revivalists have overlooked traditional music in Conamara in favour of *sean-nós* song, viewing Conamara *sean-nós* as being a cultural remnant of an ancient Gaelic civilisation,²³ a type of Gaelic art music, which would form the basis for contemporary Irish art music.²⁴ Consequently much of the vernacular instrumental music and dance tradition of Conamara has been dismissed by revivalists because it was regarded as being the crude and bawdy expression of a peasant class. However, in the past, *sean-nós* in Carraroe did not stand apart from instrumental music and dance; instead music, song, dance, and storytelling were different aspects of the same process, the process of musicking which reinforced community bonds at the country house dances.

John Millington Synge in an account of his travels throughout Conamara makes reference to an encounter with an elderly man near the village of Carraroe (which he calls ‘the poorest village in Ireland’) in 1905. He informed Synge that there was no longer any music to be heard in the area:

Though in the old times it’s many a piper would be moving through those houses for a whole quarter together, playing his pipes and drinking poteen [sic] and the people dancing round him; but now there is no dancing or singing in this place at all, and most of the young people is [sic] growing up and going to America.²⁵

The above quotation is consistent with the observation that Irish vernacular music was silenced for a time after the great Famine of the 1840s and 1850s;²⁶ it also illustrates the drain that emigration was having on the Carraroe community. However, it also indicates that instrumental music and dance were originally part of the country-house dances in Carraroe.

In the recent past, the country house dances in Carraroe were primarily participatory events, and this form of musicking mirrored the general culture of Carraroe; neighbours who shared *meitheal* together would further strengthen community relations by musicking together. Everyone attending such a country house dance would be expected to have their own 'party piece', very often a song. Nowadays it is difficult to sing *sean-nós* without being aware of the burden of responsibility one has to the tradition.²⁷ *Sean-nós* singers are not just viewed as performers: they are often regarded as heroic, carrying on a legacy from their forbearers. *Sean-nós* has consequently been elevated to become a specialised practice, so much so that many in Conamara today who are able to sing would be reluctant to perform a *sean-nós* song in public, for fear of being seen as 'not traditional' or just 'not good enough'. By framing *sean-nós* as 'art' music, Gaelic revivalists have in essence appropriated the recreational musicking of the Carraroe community making Irish traditional music and *sean-nós* in particular an index of an imagined Gaeltacht, based on a primitive ideal. This imagined Gaeltacht bears little resemblance to actual Gaeltacht life either contemporary or historic, and it is regrettable but understandable that some members of the Carraroe community would come to reject *sean-nós* and traditional music because of its association with such a caricature of their community. CC&W emerged in the 1980s both as an expression of a subversive voice from within the Gaeltacht community, and as a contemporary vernacular form of Gaeltacht recreational musicking.

Music in Carraroe today

Today a visitor to the village of Carraroe in search of music is likely to encounter CC&W, popular electronic-dance music, traditional instrumental music and possibly, but rarely, *sean-nós*. Popular electronic dance-music is performed on a regular basis in the village's one night-club. The most common music is CC&W, and local professional and semi-professional groups regularly perform in Carraroe public houses. A circuit exists for these bands which encompasses much of Conamara, and parts of the UK and North America, where a strong Conamara diaspora exists. Although Country and Western is popular all over Ireland, particularly in rural Ireland, Conamara Country is unique because it is sung in Irish. This style of music first emerged in the 1980s, influenced by the showbands that regularly toured Conamara and the growing popularity of the Nashville sound. However, unlike many other Irish country singers John 'Beag' (junior) Ó Flatharta (the man credited with inventing this genre) felt it was wrong for him to sing with an 'American' or Mid-Atlantic accent.²⁸ He also felt strongly that his music should reflect his own surroundings, culture and environment.

By performing with amplification, and with non-traditional instruments such as drum machines, John Beag, and those who followed after him, subverted the image of the Gaeltacht as a primitive ideal. They created a genre of music that indexed the cosmopolitan nature of contemporary Connemara. Cosmopolitanism is a type of 'trans-state cultural formation with common habits of thought and practice shared among groups of people in

widely dispersed “locales”²⁹. But: ‘cosmopolitanism is always simultaneously local and translocal; people in each local site will develop a somewhat distinctive combination of habits drawn from the cosmopolitan formation’.³⁰ Therefore, while CC&W bears a number of similarities to American Country and Western music, such as instrument choice, chord progressions, and guitar licks, it is also distinct in a number of ways. CC&W bands often include a button accordion player, or a keyboard player with a keyboard-synthesiser set to sound like a button accordion. The prominence of the button accordion sound in CC&W, an index of the older musical tradition of the area, links this contemporary genre with the past, and the use of Irish-language vocals also marks the localness of this genre.

While many individuals in Carraroe are drawn to CC&W, *sean-nós* song and traditional music are widely regarded with a mixture of apathy and scorn. Carraroe, like other Gaeltacht areas, has of course benefited from its position as a reservation of ‘authentic Irishness’, and while many of Carraroe’s population acknowledge this and are proud of their position in Irish society, many others resent the framing of their community as a primitive ideal. ‘Semantic snowballing’ refers to the potential collecting of multiple layers of indexical meanings around a single sign-vehicle, and it is a useful concept for deciphering Carraroe’s relationship to *sean-nós*. My own research indicates that, for the reasons outlined above, many of the Carraroe’s population (to varying degrees depending on the individual) regard the genre simultaneously with a mixture of pride, affection, sentimentality, apathy, shame and scorn. I propose that this is due to the fact that, although primarily an index of the imagined Gaeltacht of Romantic cultural nationalism, *sean-nós* contains indexical traces of *meitheal* and community belonging. But, CC&W not only subverts the ideal of Gaelic revivalists, it is also free of the cultural baggage that has marginalised *sean-nós* in Carraroe.

CC&W events in Carraroe, indeed, are strongly reminiscent of *sean-nós* song events and other country house music traditions generally. CC&W songs tend to be story songs, celebrating local heroes or chronicling local events, and of course they are sung in Irish, all features shared with the *sean-nós* tradition. CC&W songs are played in waltz or jive time to facilitate dancing, and a particular idiosyncratic form of jiving has emerged over the years, reminiscent of *sean-nós*³¹ dancing.³² It is tempting therefore to view CC&W as a reworking of the Irish music song and dance tradition of the former country house dances, and arguably CC&W is a living vernacular Irish music genre. However, CC&W events differ significantly from the older country house dances in a number of ways. CC&W is performed in public houses, spaces that tend not to be as intimate as the kitchen of a country house. Couples dancing at CC&W events appear to be very aware that they are on display and in this regard dancing at CC&W events is as much presentational as it is participatory,³³ differing from country house dances, which were fully participatory events.

CC&W bands almost always perform with amplification at high levels relative to the size of the venues. This means that verbal communication at these events can be quite problematic. Although it is well understood that the fostering of community spirit does not necessarily require verbal communication, in this instance I believe amplitude is acting as an extension of technologically induced social isolation. In some instances loud music may function to help create a shared sense of togetherness and belonging amongst participants,³⁴ but here I propose that the isolation that has become a daily reality for many in Carraroe is

being mirrored by the loudness of the CC&W bands. In the not so distant past *meitheal* was elemental to Carraroe life, and could only function in a community that had a strong sense of togetherness. The country house dance was a ritual where music, song, and dance functioned to reinforce the sense of community belonging that was necessary for maintaining the smooth running of a co-operative labour system such as *meitheal*. Technological advancement has brought countless benefits to Carraroe, but it has also eroded the sense of interdependence and togetherness that existed in the recent past, a situation which has directly influenced how, and what kind of, music is performed in the area.

Conclusions

Because of the influence of Romantic cultural nationalism *sean-nós* is widely seen as an unchanging idiom. Musicians and singers in the Gaeltacht wishing to experiment with *sean-nós* would have to navigate the perilous waters of preservationism and notions of authenticity; Country and Western not only seems relevant to contemporary Gaeltacht life, it is free from the cultural baggage that threatens to drown *sean-nós*. I have argued that the loudness of CC&W events mirrors the social isolation of contemporary Gaeltacht life, perhaps by doing so CC&W acts as a cathartic release for this community. A growing number of young *sean-nós* singers have emerged in Conamara in recent years. The Joe Heaney underage *sean-nós* singing competitions held annually in Carna as part of Féile Joe Éinniú (the Joe Heaney Festival) is well attended as is the underage singing competitions at the Oireachtas. However, *sean-nós* remains a marginalised genre and most singers rely on singing competitions as their primary vehicle for performance.

Notes

¹ Originally the term ‘Gaeltacht’ meant the ‘Irishry’, but today the term is used to denote the Irish/Gaelic-speaking districts of Ireland – see Cairtriona Ó Torna, *Cruthú na Gaeltachta 1893–1922* (Baile Átha Cliath: Cois Life Teoranta, 2005). In all, there are seven Gaeltacht districts in Ireland, most of them on the west coast stretching from Donegal to Kerry (see *Údarás na Gaeltachta* [2013], Enterprise Development, available: <http://www.udaras.ie/en/forbairt-fiontraiochta/> [accessed 06 August 2013]). Collectively, the various Gaeltacht districts, or, ‘Gaeltachtaí’ (plural), make up 6% of the total surface of Ireland – see Eileen Moore Quinn, ‘Entextualizing Famine, Reconstituting Self: Testimonial Narratives from Ireland’, *Anthropology Quarterly*, 74, no. 2 (2001), 72–88 (p. 75).

² I use this somewhat clumsy term to describe the psychological effect industrialisation within a capitalist system has had on the Carraroe community. Capitalism promotes materialism and ‘human relinquishment – the abandonment of things, practices, places and people, and the loss of human interaction and exchange – in lieu of more impersonal and abstract exchanges’ – see Susan H. Motherway, *The Globalisation of Irish Traditional Song Performance* (Surrey, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), p. 175.

³ ‘*Seán-nós*’ is the Irish (Gaelic) for ‘old style, way, or method.’ ‘*Seán-nós* song’ is used to indicate unaccompanied traditional solo singing in the Irish/Gaelic language, and, since 1975, it has been used to describe a form of Irish step-dance that has a particular association with Connemara – *seán-nós* dance, also ‘old style step-dance’.

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⁴ The abbreviation CC&W will be used to refer to Irish-language ‘Connemara, Country and Western’; ‘Irish’ will be used to indicate the Irish Gaelic language.

⁵ All statistics date from 2012.

⁶ NUIG is based in what were formally the local primary and secondary (technical) schools in Carraroe. The unit is now named after the celebrated Irish-language writer and Gaeltacht-rights activist from Connemara, Máirtín Ó Cadhin.

⁷ A subsidiary of RTÉ, RnaG is the major Irish language station. It commenced broadcasting in 1972; the Irish language and Irish traditional music have been central to the stations output – see Fintan Vallely, *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, 2nd edn (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011), p. 560.

⁸ ‘Telefís na Gaeilge Channel 4’ was established in 1996 and it is Ireland’s national Irish-language television station (see Vallely, 2011, p. 680).

⁹ Established in 1980, Údarás na Gaeltachta is the regional authority responsible for the economic, social and cultural development of the Gaeltacht. It has a governing board of 20 members (17 of whom are democratically elected by the community) and a staff of 96 to implement its development brief (Údarás na Gaeltachta, op. cit., 2013).

¹⁰ Micheál Ó Conghaile, *Conamara agus Árainn 1880–1980: Gnéithe den Stair Shóisialta (Indreabhán) (County na Gaillimhe: Cló Iar Chonnachta, 1998).*

¹¹ See Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), for more on ‘musicking’.

¹² Ó Conghaile, pp. 148–169.

¹³ An almost unbroken line of bungalows stretches along the South Connemara coast from Bearna in the east (now an outlying suburb of Galway city) to Carraroe in the southwest. The cartographer and cultural geographer, Tim Robinson, describes the area as a dispersed suburbia. See Tim Robinson, *Connemara: A Little Gaelic Kingdom* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2011), p. 318.

¹⁴ Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 145.

¹⁵ Caitríona Ó Torna, *Cruthú na Gaeltachta 1893–1922* (Baile Átha Cliath: Cois Life, 2005).

¹⁶ Catherine Nash, ‘Embodying the Nation: The West of Ireland Landscape and Irish Identity’, in *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis*, ed. by Barbara O’Connor and Michael Cronin (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), pp. 86–112; John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Irish Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

¹⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 2nd edn (London: Vintage, 1994).

¹⁸ Motherway, pp. 59–81.

¹⁹ Donncha Ó Súilleabháin, *Scéal an Oireachtais 1897–1924* (Baile Átha Cliath: Clóchomhar, 1984), p. 111.

²⁰ Éamonn Costello, ‘*Sean-nós* as Vehicle for Cultural Revival’ (unpublished master’s thesis, University College Cork, 2008).

²¹ An t-Oireachtas, which means ‘assembly’, was established by the Gaelic League in 1897 as a festival of Irish culture. The festival was inspired by Scotland’s Mod and Wales’s Eisteddfod festivals. The Oireachtas is primarily concerned with celebrating and promoting the Irish language.

²² Anthony McCann and Lillis Ó Laoire, “‘Raising One Higher than the Other’: The Hierarchy of Tradition in Representations of Gaelic and English Language Song in Ireland’ in *Global Pop Local Language*, ed. by Harris M. Berger and Michael T. Carroll (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2003), pp. 233–265.

²³ Not all revivalists favour the Connemara style. The Munster styles associated with Waterford and Cork have, in particular, been described as the oldest of the *sean-nós* styles with clear links to the old bardic tradition (see Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (London: M.H. Gill and Son, 1924).

²⁴ Nineteenth century Irish cultural nationalists differed on their views on *sean-nós* and traditional music. Progressivists believed traditional music should be used as the building block for an Irish art music, while nativists believed the vernacular music of Ireland, particularly *sean-nós*, was Irish art music (see Costello, 2008).

²⁵ J. M. Synge, *Travelling Ireland, Essays 1898–1908*, ed. by Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2009).

²⁶ Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, ‘Amhrán an Ghorta: The Great Famine and Irish Traditional Music’, *New Hibernia Review*, 3, no. 1 (1999), 19–44.

²⁷ R. Nic Dhonncha, official launch of *Bright Star of the West: Joe Heaney, Irish Song Man*, by Sean Williams and Lillis Ó Laoire at The Joe Heaney Commemorative Festival of Traditional Singing and Music, 29 April, Aras Shorcha Ní Ghuirim, Carna (2011).

²⁸ ‘Ar Ancaire’, TG4, documentary film, produced and directed by Seán Ó Cualáin (19 December 2010).

²⁹ Turino, p. 142.

³⁰ Turino, p. 125.

³¹ The term was first used in the 1970s in reference to a highly individualistic and improvisational form of step-dancing performed in the Conamara area. Largely ignored at the time, it has become an essential part of the Oireachtas festival in recent years.

³² Helen Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, 2nd edn (Dingle, Co. Kerry: Brandon, 2004).

³³ Turino, 2008.

³⁴ For example, many concertgoers describe a special state of consciousness, a sense of excitement they get when listening to really loud music, i.e., over 115dB; see Daniel Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: Understanding a Human Obsession* (London: Atlantic Books, 2008), p. 71. It is possible therefore that concert-goers experiencing such heightened states of excitement would feel a sense of connection with fellow concert-goers, a sense of community.