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## Notes on *Say Nothing* by Patrick Radden Keefe

*Author's Endnote Observations.* The book is the product of four years of research, seven trips to Northern Ireland, interviews with more than 100 people.

- Memory is a slippery thing – the challenge of achieving corroboration amid inconsistencies was significant
- The book is not a history book, but a narrative non-fiction. What's the difference?
- The work is not a balanced account – if you want to know more about Loyalist terrorism activities, there are plenty of other materials to read
- The history of the Troubles is vexed and inflected by partisan predispositions
- Gerry Adams refused to give an interview and asserted that the Boston College oral history project was deeply flawed. He had maintained his denial of any involvement in the Jean McConville murder or the leadership of the IRA notwithstanding the existence of overwhelming information that he was deeply involved in both. The downside of denying something that everyone knows to be true is that the value of anything you say inevitably starts to depreciate
- Boston College was not a good steward of the highly inflammatory confidential oral histories it collected about the Troubles and the school ultimately sought to jettison the secret tapes and stories of the Troubles to avoid further custodial responsibilities

*The IRA Split.* In the late sixties and early seventies a split developed within the IRA, with groups becoming known as the Provisional IRA or “Provos” (endorsing violence to effect change) and the Officials or “Stickies” (the more moderate wing of the group). The riveting orientation message to the new Provos recruits: “Either you are going to jail or you are going to die.”

*The emergence of women in important roles.* The Price sisters, Delours and Marian, joined the Provos and developed a reputation for being snipers, widow-makers and glamorous and dangerous fighters.

*The futility of non-violent resistance and the onset of war.* In January 1972, British paratroopers opened fire in Derry on a peaceful crowd, killing 13 and wounding 15. This event became known as “Bloody Sunday” and was galvanizing for Irish republicans – made them very angry. The rhetoric of the time evolved to a wartime beat: “If my political convictions led me to take part in murder, I would confess without hesitation” (Delours interview). The year 1972 marked a highpoint in violence for the period of the Troubles. 500 people lost their lives. The July 1972 bombings across Belfast, orchestrated by Brendan Hughes, produced particularly gory results (Bloody Friday), with many innocent non-combatants killed or wounded.

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*Floating Prison.* The HMS *Maidstone*, floating off Belfast, became a prison ship for Irish republican prisoners, including Gerry Adams; it was a brutal and oppressive sardine tin.

*Boston College and the Belfast Project.* BC had a dignified legacy as a bastion of scholarship on Irish history. In 2000, with violence winding down following the Good Friday Agreement, the school considered some way of documenting the Troubles. The product of the research was intended to become available for the benefit of future generations of graduate students. Ed Moloney was named director of the project. He was known as a tough-minded reporter on the Troubles. Came up with the idea that participants could be invited to give their oral histories on a confidential basis. Problem of admitting to involvement in the IRA (which was a crime) or of being a “tout” (Touts regularly were executed). The challenge to BC: you had to figure out a way to interview people now with a guaranteed promise that their testimony would not be released until they were dead – the plan was to create a sealed archive like a time capsule. The inducement: have Anthony McIntyre (known as Macker), a former respected Provos militant, conduct the interviews.

A key point, regarding the risks to those who agreed to talk, is that the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (discussed below), while providing for the release of paramilitary prisoners, many of whom had committed atrocious acts of violence, provided no truth-and-reconciliation mechanism that would allow people of Northern Ireland openly to address and disclose the painful history of the Troubles. The Belfast Project aimed to address this hole by allowing people to talk and thereby create a protected treasure trove of information about the Troubles. Nevertheless, many participants in the Troubles, most notably Gerry Adams, remained queasy about whether it was safe to come clean. As the poet Seamus Heaney wrote:

*O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod  
Whatever you say, say nothing*

Given the reluctance of people to talk, the sulfurous intrigue of the past would continue to linger. While some people did open up, in the context of legal proceedings where they were protected by immunity from prosecution, many others would not do so out of fear. And the IRA never really went away.

Unfortunately, in the end, much of the confidential material collected by BC was retrieved via subpoena and other legal processes and disclosed to the courts and the public. The Belfast Project was poorly organized by the College, the research plan was not shared with leaders of the school’s academic departments (which might have been done to garner their support), the related privacy and confidentiality undertakings were ineffectively documented, and the efforts by the British authorities to uncover these highly inflammatory secrets to advance criminal prosecutions were weakly and ineffectively resisted by the College. The people who organized the Project failed at the time to consult with legal counsel for direction on the best way to protect the confidentiality of the oral histories. This became a serious mistake.

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*Disillusionment.* People like Brendan Hughes, who fought hard for the IRA, came to feel that the Good Friday Agreement represented a terrible concession in that it codified formal acceptance by the Irish republican movement that the British would remain in Ireland. He'd killed people for the cause of uniting Ireland. Hughes deeply resented that the IRA leadership made a critical political shift to the peace process without consulting with the IRA fighters. He blamed Gerry Adams. "What the fuck was it for?"

*Ricky O'Rawe and the Hunger Strike.* Margaret Thatcher offered concessions to the republican prisoners that were sufficient to convince them to cease their hunger strike (this was at the time when Bobby Sands and three others had already died). These concessions were largely acceptable to the strikers, but Gerry Adams (the IRA leader) told them not to accept the deal, with the result that six more strikers ultimately perished. O'Rawe, one of the leaders of the hunger strike, came to believe that Adams deliberately perpetuated the strike to engender publicity that would support Adams's political aspirations: a steady supply of martyrs was indispensable in launching Sinn Fein as a viable political party. To O'Rawe, this was the moment that "split the atom." Was Gerry Adams a sociopath?

Dolours Price believed that the Good Friday Agreement was a double-cross. The settlement betrayed what she had been born into: "For what Sinn Fein achieved today, I would not have missed a good breakfast," she said. She suffered a moral injury that undermined her ability to have ethical justification for what she and others had done for the cause of unification. This feeling was exacerbated by the fact that the person who led republicanism to peace was her long-time commander, Gerry Adams.

*Jean McConville's Murder.* Hughes, in his oral interview with Mackers, said that Gerry Adams had known about and approved the operation, though Hughes said the murder was justified because McConville was a tout.

*Assorted Other Players.* Fearsome spy hunter, Freddie Scappaticci, known as "Scap". Vicious interrogator and killer, serving as a member of the IRA's Nutting Squad (while also working as a double agent for the British!). He was known as "Steak Knife", a dagger in the heart of the IRA. He allegedly killed 50 IRA members for purportedly serving as touts, but also allegedly saved as many as 180 for the British. What does the math mean? Was the British government complicit in murder? The IRA became hopelessly infiltrated with double-agents, with some estimates as high as one in four members by the end of the Troubles.

Ivor Bell was another character within the IRA. There was an attempt to convict him for involvement in the murder of Jean McConville (for aiding and abetting, or soliciting). He served as chief of staff of the IRA. He ultimately gave an oral interview with Mackers.

*The Disappeared.* As a result of the Good Friday Agreement, a binational entity called the Independent Commission for the Location of Peoples' Remains was established. Going back to the *Iliad*, burial rights have always generated deep emotions: family survivors' desire to achieve

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closure. At least sixteen individuals remained missing, including Jean McConville. According to Delours Price, Gerry Adams played a key role in the disappearance of victims. She admitted to direct involvement in the disappearance of Joe Lynskey and Jean McConville on orders from Gerry.

Three members of the so-called “Unknowns” tasked with disappearing people were Wee Pat McClure and the two Price sisters.

*The Teflon Man, Gerry Adams.* Gerry believed that to remain silent was the best policy. Recalling his imprisonment on the *Maidstone*, Gerry amazingly insisted that his name was not Gerry Adams. He stubbornly stuck to his story: “even though they knew who I was, it was irrelevant. I couldn’t answer their questions, on the basis that I wasn’t who they said I was.”

*It’s Never Over.* As recently reported, many of the main paramilitary groups who fought in the Troubles remain in existence, though operating at reduced levels. They still have access to weapons. And the community of Northern Ireland remains as divided as ever. They still live in neighborhoods circumscribed by religion. More than 90 percent of the children still attend segregated elementary schools. Bus stops are designated Catholic or Protestant, and locals, for good reason, walk an extra block or two to wait at the right stop (thereby avoiding harassment). Different flags fly in different neighborhoods. Tribalism and its trappings remain potent.

The irony is that the existence and cohesion of the paramilitary groups have played an important role in enabling the transition from extreme violence to political progress. These organizations retain the power to restrain, influence and manage their members.

“*Whataboutery*”. There are strong feelings among some that prosecution of those involved in the Troubles has been unfairly focused against the IRA, as there were plenty of murders carried out by the Loyalists side as well. This dispute is unresolvable, in that for every atrocity on one side, there is an equal and horrendously savage act on the other side: “*What about Bloody Sunday*” to which one responds “*What about Bloody Friday,*” and so forth.

In the recent book by Colum McCann (*Transatlantic*), in the chapter describing the role of former U.S. Senator George Mitchell in the efforts to achieve peace in Northern Ireland, the author describes the back-and-forth cadence of persistent violence:

News comes later in the morning. A murder in Derry. A member of the paramilitaries. The statements are out. The press releases. The men of violence. Pointless retaliation. Trevor Deeney. Sitting in a car beside his wife. Shot point-blank. For what reason? Is there ever a reason? There will be retaliation. Already promised. This murder, too, is retaliation. Murder the murderers. Deeney’s brother opened fire in a bar call The Rising Sun. No end to the ironies.....

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*The Play, Cyprus Avenue.* This is a black comedy about the Troubles. It's hilarious and absurd and it ends in horrific violence. It's a study in the derangement of bigotry, a portrait of Northern Ireland as a land consumed by feverish pathology, and an inquiry into the inability to shake free of what has gone before.

The past is present.

No history is mute. No matter how much they own it, break it, and lie about it, human history refuses to shut its mouth. Despite deafness and ignorance, the time that was continues to tick inside the time that is.

-- Eduardo Galeano (quote from *Transatlantic*)

*Collective denial.* The author concludes that the whole truth of this dark saga will never be known because the individuals who still know the truth will take it with them to their graves.

*United Ireland?* The war may ultimately be won by changes in demographics. Catholics may soon outnumber Protestants in Northern Ireland. But, as Adams wisely cautioned, outbreeding Protestants may be an enjoyable pastime, for those who have the energy, but it's hardly a political strategy.

## The Good Friday Agreement

*A Short History.* The partition of Ireland in 1921 followed more than a century of unrest between Britain and Ireland. Under the Act of Union of 1800, Ireland lost its parliament in Dublin and became governed directly from London. For much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, varying states of tension and conflict developed as unionists campaigned for Ireland to remain part of the UK, while nationalists campaigned for either home rule or an independent Irish state. The issue of Irish home rule dominated domestic British politics from 1885 to the start of the First World War.

In April 1916, the Easter Rising shook Dublin, as a group of Irish nationalists proclaimed the establishment of an Irish Republic and clashed with British troops in the capital. The rising, which resulted in the loss of 450 lives and destroyed much of the center of Dublin, was ended by the British within a week. However, the public mood shifted decisively when the 15 leaders of the rising were executed by the British authorities in May 1916. The executions and imposition of martial law fueled public resentment of the British. The next five tumultuous years, including the Irish War of Independence (1919–21), resulted in the end of British rule across most of Ireland.

The Government of Ireland Act, which became law in May 1921, split Ireland. Northern Ireland was formed from the six predominantly unionist counties in the north-east of the island. The

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remaining 26 predominantly nationalist counties formed the 'south', becoming the independent Irish Free State in 1922.

Fast forward to the last 30 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century during which Northern Ireland was wracked by the Troubles, which left over 3,700 people dead and thousands more injured.

*The Terms of the Agreement.* The Good Friday Agreement, also called the Belfast Agreement, was agreed upon in Belfast on 10 April 1998. The Agreement, actually a series of agreements, was complex and difficult to achieve. It was brokered in significant part by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell. It represented a milestone achievement, a triumph of political negotiation over violence. The arrangements established a new governance structure for North Ireland that contemplated a pull-back by England from direct rule over Northern Ireland and provided for a series of agreements between and among most but not all of Northern Ireland's political parties as well as an international agreement between the British and Irish governments. A summary of these arrangements follows.

*General Principles.* The Agreement acknowledged that the majority of the people of Northern Ireland wished to remain in the United Kingdom but also that a substantial section of the people of Northern Ireland and a majority of the people of the island of Ireland wished to bring about a united Ireland.

For the first time, the Irish government accepted in a binding international agreement that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom. However, the language of the Agreement reflects a switch in the United Kingdom's emphasis from one for the union to one for a united Ireland. The Agreement left the issue of sovereignty over Northern Ireland open-ended. Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom until a majority of the people both of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland wished otherwise. Should that happen, then the British and the Irish governments are under a binding obligation to implement that choice.

The two governments agreed that, irrespective of the position of Northern Ireland, the power of sovereign government there should be exercised with rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and traditions, with full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

As part of the Agreement, the British government repealed a 1920 law that established Northern Ireland, partitioned Ireland and asserted territorial claim over all of Ireland. For its part, the Republic of Ireland amended its Constitution to eliminate its territorial claim over Northern Ireland.

*Specific Governance Provisions.* The Agreement provided framework for the creation of a number of institutions, set out in three so-called "strands":

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- Strand 1 dealt with the democratic institutions of Northern Ireland and established two major institutions: (1) the Northern Ireland Assembly and (2) the Northern Ireland Executive. The Assembly is a devolved legislature for Northern Ireland with mandatory cross-community voting on major decisions; it is an elected assembly responsible for most local matters. The Executive (a branch of the Northern Ireland Assembly) is a power-sharing executive committee with ministerial portfolios allocated between the parties.
- Strand 2 dealt with “north-south” issues and institutions to be created between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, including (1) the North-South Ministerial Council, (2) the North-South Inter-Parliamentary Association, and (3) the North South Consultative Forum. The Ministerial Council is made up of ministers from the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government of Ireland to establish consultation, cooperation and action on identified areas of mutual interest. The newly created Northern Ireland Assembly and the national parliament of Ireland agreed to consider creating the Inter-Parliamentary Association made up of equal members from both institutions. And the Northern Ireland political parties who endorsed the Agreement were asked to consider the establishment of an independent consultative forum representative of civil society with members having expertise in social, cultural, economic and other issues and appointed by the two administrations.
- Strand 3 dealt with “east-west” issues and institutions to be created between Ireland and Britain, including (1) the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, (2) the British Irish Council, and (3) an expanded British-Irish Interparliamentary Body.

The overall general purpose of these arrangements was to foster cooperation and provide fora for the creation of common policies. These arrangements were intended to be interlocking and interdependent.

*Decommissioning and Normalization.* Against the backdrop of the Troubles, the Agreement committed the participants to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving political differences, with two aspects: (1) the decommissioning of weapons held by paramilitary groups and (2) the normalization of security arrangements in Northern Ireland.

The participants comprised the two sovereign states (Britain and Ireland), with armed forces involved in the Troubles, and two political parties, Sinn Fein and the Progressive Unionist Party that were linked to paramilitary organizations, the Provos (IRA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), respectively. The Ulster Democratic Party, which also had a paramilitary force, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), withdrew from the peace talks.

The Agreement committed the parties to decommission paramilitary arms within two years of the referenda approving the Agreement (May 2000). The process of normalization committed

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the British government to a reduction in the number and role of its armed forces in Northern Ireland to levels compatible with a normal peaceful society. The British government also committed to a wide-ranging review of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. For its part, the Irish government committed to a broad review of its security laws.

Both the British and Irish governments committed to the early release of prisoners serving sentences in connection with paramilitary activities, provided that the paramilitary groups continued to maintain a cease-fire. 428 paramilitary prisoners from both sides of the community were to walk free. 143 of them had been serving life sentences for things like murders and bombings. *Importantly, however, there was no amnesty for crimes which had not been prosecuted.* This gap had particular relevance to those Provo militants who gave their oral histories to BC as part of the Belfast Project. These people were still exposed to the threat of criminal prosecution for crimes disclosed in the tapes (see discussion above).

The process of disarming the paramilitary organizations proceeded slowly, causing the Northern Ireland Assembly to be suspended on a number of occasions. In July 2005, the IRA announced the formal end of its campaign. The Loyalist decommissioning did not immediately follow. In June 2009, the UVF announced it had completed decommissioning and the UDA said it had started to decommission its arsenal.

*Approval and Implementation.* Various aspects of the Agreement and related documents were required to be approved via referenda in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These referenda were approved in 1998 by substantial majorities.

Direct London rule came to an end in Northern Ireland when power was formally devolved to the new Northern Ireland Assembly, the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council effective in December 1999. A significant change had thereby been effected: the British government was effectively out of the equation, and neither British parliament nor people had any legal right to impede the achievement of Irish unity if it had the consent of the people of the North and the South.

The Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive were established in December 1999, though, as noted above, the Assembly was suspended from time to time because of decommissioning issues. Moreover, ongoing paramilitary activity (albeit at a reduced level) by the Provos has been a stumbling block. Loyalist paramilitary activity has also continued to a degree.

The overall result of these challenges was to damage confidence in the Agreement, causing disruptions with the power-sharing Executive, beginning in 2002. Following several years of negotiations, a power-sharing Executive was re-established to govern Northern Ireland in 2007. In January 2017, one of the key ministers of the Executive resigned and has not yet been replaced. Talks are continuing among Sinn Fein and other party leaders to agree on the appointment of a new minister so that the devolved government in Stormont can be restored. No government is currently in power.



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*The Brexit Conundrum.* During the negotiations on Britain's planned 2019 withdrawal from the European Union, the EU produced a position paper on its concerns regarding support of the Good Friday Agreement expressed by the UK during Brexit. The position paper addressed topics including the avoidance of a hard border, the North-South cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland, the birthright of all of the people of Northern Ireland (as set out in the Agreement), and the Common Travel Area. Anyone born in Northern Ireland, and thus entitled to an Irish passport by the Good Friday Agreement, would also be able to retain EU citizenship after Brexit.

Under the European Union negotiating directives for Brexit, the UK was asked to satisfy the other EU members that these topics had been addressed in order to progress to the second stage of Brexit negotiations. In order to protect North-South co-operation and avoid controls on the Irish border, the UK agreed to protect the Agreement in all its parts and, in the absence of agreed solutions, the UK would agree to maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South cooperation, the all-island economy and the protection of the Agreement.

Given the current uncertain status of Brexit, the possible effects upon the relationships between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland remain very unclear.

*The Circumstances Today.* An IRA offshoot, known as the New IRA, has been linked to several recent terrorist attacks, including a car bomb in Londonderry in January and a shooting last week. Riots broke out in Londonderry after the police raided a home in a nationalist area to search for arms and explosives that security forces feared would be used in an upcoming attack. Amid the melee, a masked militant from the New IRA fired shots toward a police van. One of the bullets struck a nearby 29-year old woman reporter, Lyra McKee. She died. A well respected, influential journalist, her death jolted the region as unionist and nationalist leaders issued joint statements of condemnation and made joint appearances in Londonderry. They made encouraging noises about restarting power-sharing talks. In a follow-up statement, the New IRA apologized for the unintentional shooting of the journalist.

The bottom line is that violence in Northern Ireland continues, albeit at a low level. A Dublin reporter, Sinead O'Shea, describing the community of Northern Ireland, noted that symptoms akin to PTSD have gone undiagnosed. Drug use, alcoholism and suicide are common. Small grievances escalate into shootings. It doesn't appear that many people are actively engaged in efforts to heal the enduring rifts in Northern Ireland. The news crews and big-name politicians lost interest, and neighborhoods were allowed to fester. In some Catholic areas of Derry, many children are born into poverty. Somewhere along the way, it was forgotten that both veterans of the Troubles and their children might crave the status and purpose that the Troubles provided. Radicalization of young men is therefore not surprising.

The reporter concluded with the following admonition:

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Northern Ireland continues to exist in a post-conflict state. It is a place of both pain and recovery. It cannot be abandoned. The politicians of Britain and Northern Ireland must lead, and we all must pay more attention to these communities. The stakes are too high, as the killing of Ms. McKee shows. Wars take a long time to end, and peace is a process that must be protected.

*Personal Footnote.* My great-grandfather, Michael Igoe, was born in County Mayo, Ireland, in the year 1847, in the middle of the Great Famine. My Irish forbears were certainly not “laced curtain” and this was obviously not a good time to be adding mouths to feed. Fortunately for me, Michael migrated first to England and then to the U.S., ultimately settling in St. Louis.

My upbringing there was that of a traditional Irish Catholic. In a bit of irony, for six years I (and many other local Irish Catholic boys) attended a new parochial school that was run by English Benedictine monks who had journeyed to the Midwest from Ampleforth Abbey in Yorkshire. The English – Irish clash was notably absent from my consciousness at the time, though I did observe that our school’s English headmaster, who occasionally visited our house for a free meal and relaxation, would wryly note to my father, while saying grace, that God blessed both the English and the Irish.

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Tom Igoe